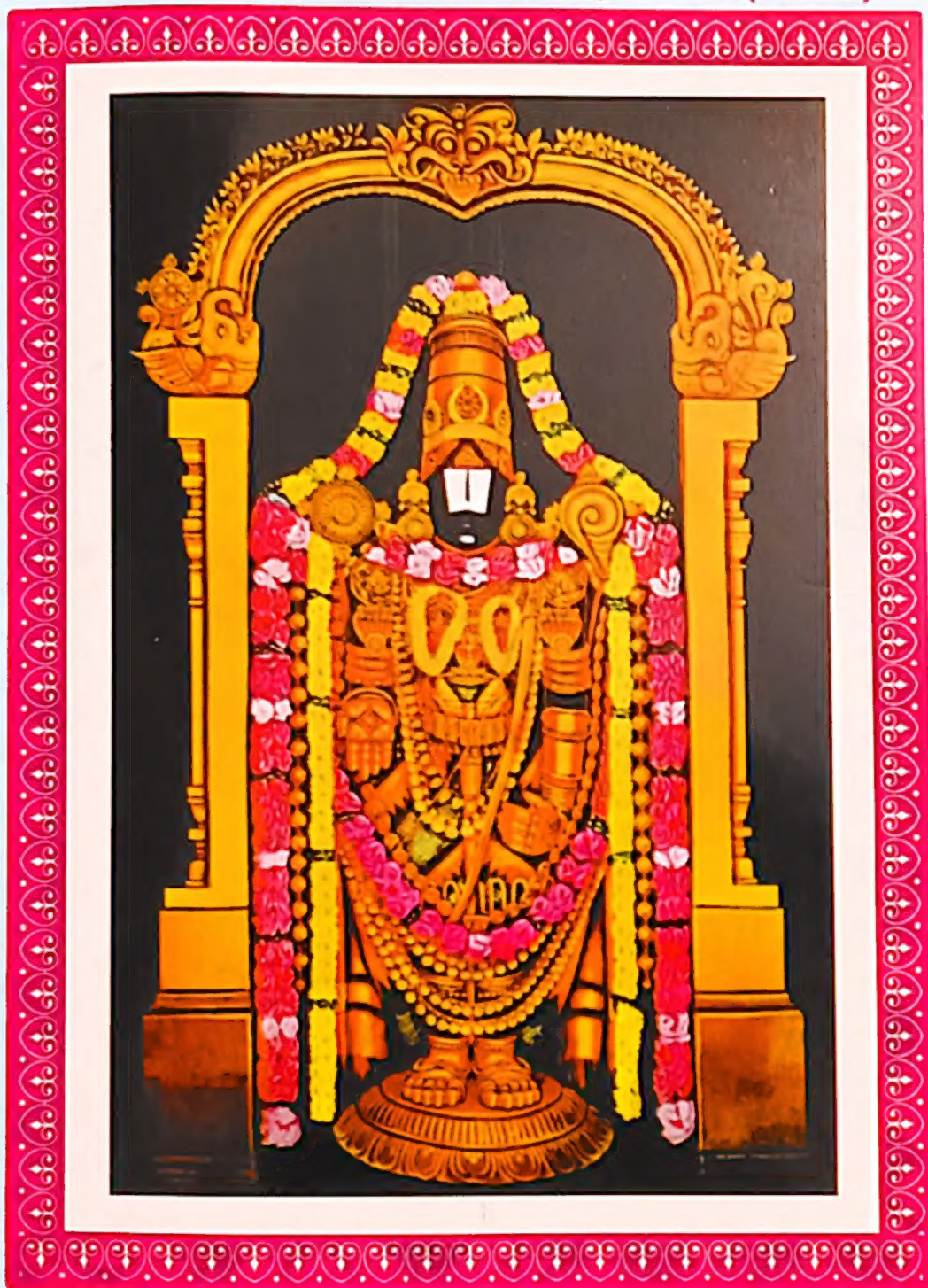


108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME FOUR

Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S.(Retd)



TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

TIRUPATI

1996

108

VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME FOUR

DIVYA DESAMS IN PANDYA NADU

Miss M.S. RAMESH, I.A.S.



Published by

Sri N. RAMESH KUMAR, I.A.S.,

Executive Officer

T.T. DEVASTHANAMS

TIRUPATI

1996

108 Vaishnavite Divya Desams - IV

By

Miss. M.S.Ramesh I.A.S

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FOREWORD

Sri Ramanuja has postulated in his 'Sri Bhashya', that Lord Narayana is the embodiment of the qualities that are sublime in creation – 'Vatsalya' (tender solicitude), 'Sauseelya' (loving condescension) and 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) . By manifestation through Vyuha, Para, Vibhava, Antaryami and Arch forms, the Lord showers his eternal grace.

The alwars have sung in ecstasy and in praise of the Lord. Their hymns in praise of 108 Divya Desams (sacred shrines) are a source of continuing inspiration to all of us.

In the present volume, Miss. M.S. Ramesh describes at great length the sthalapuranam and the spiritual significance of 19 divya desas of ancient Pandya nadu (mostly now in Tirunelveli , Chidambaranar Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, districts). These include such celebrated pilgrim centres such like Alwar Tirunagari, Srivalliputtur, Azhagar Koil and Thirugoshtiur. The new volume also contains a special chapter on 'Periya Thiruvadi' - popularly known as Garudalwar, the loyal servitor of the Lord.

The fourth volume of 108 Divya Desams like the earlier volumes, stands as a testimony to the author's piety and abiding faith and knowledge of Vaishnavite Theology and tradition. Miss Ramesh has taken meticulous care in collecting relevant materials from various sources and presenting them in delectable manner. The book epitomises the profound scholarship and deep religiosity of the author who has done an immeasurable service towards propagation and understanding of Vaishnavite tradition and Ramanuja Sampradaya.

We fervently hope that the fourth volume of 108 Divya Desams will be appreciated by the readers as in case of the previous volumes.

"Om Bhagavathe Ramanujaya Namaha"

EXECUTIVE OFFICER



அணிந்துரை

ஸ்ரீமான் பக்தவத்சலம் அவர்கள் நம்மிடம் வந்து குமாரி எம்.எஸ். ரமேஷ், ஐ.ஏ.எஸ்., அவர்கள் ஆங்கிலத்தில் எழுதியுள்ள “108 வைஷ்ணவ திவ்ய தேசங்கள்” புத்தகத்தின் நான்காம் பாகத்தினைத் தந்து படித்துச் சுவைக்கும்படி வேண்டிக்கொண்டார். யாமும், இப்பெரிய புத்தகத்தின் பல அத்தியாயங்களையும் படித்துப் பார்த்தோம். ‘ஈரொன்பதாம் பாண்டி’ என்ற பாடற்படி பாண்டிய நாட்டினுள் அமைந்துள்ள பதினெட்டு திவ்ய தேசங்களையும் பற்றி யாவரும் அறிந்துகொள்ள வேண்டிய மிக முக்கியமான தலபுராணக் கதைகள், ஆங்காங்குள்ள தாயார், பெருமாள்களின் படங்கள், வேறுபல முக்கிய குறிப்புகள் யாவும் அடங்கியுள்ளமை கண்டு பெருமகிழ்வெய்தினோம். இதுவரை வெளியிடப்பட்டுள்ள முன்பாகங்கட்காகவும், இந்த நான்காம் பாகத்திற்காவும் இந்நூலாசிரியர் மேற்கொண்ட பெருமுயற்சிகள் மிகவும் பாராட்டற்குரியவை என்பதில் பரடிப்போர் யாவர்க்குமே உடன்பாடு நிச்சயமுண்டென்றே எமது திண்ணமான எண்ணம். இந்த வெளியீட்டிற்குப் பின் நூலாசிரியர், தாம் விரும்பியுள்ளபடி எஞ்சியுள்ள திவ்யக்ஷேத்திரங்களைப் பற்றிய ஐந்தாம் பாகத்தினையும் விரைவில் வெளியிட்டு உலகினைப் பயனடைவிப்பார் என்பது எம் உறுதியான நம்பிக்கையாகும்.

எம் ஸ்ரீமடத்து அரங்கநகரப்பன் திருவருளாலும், ஸ்ரீவரமங்கை நாச்சியார் - ஸ்ரீதெய்வநாயகன் பேரருளாலும் நூலாசிரியராம் குமாரி எம்.எஸ். ரமேஷ், எல்லா நலன்களும் பெற்று, புகழொளி வீசித் திகழ்க என வாழ்த்துகிறோம்.

இவ்வரிய நூலினை வெளியிட்டு மஹோபகாரம் புரியும் திருமலை திருப்பதி தேவஸ்தான அதிகாரிகள் யாவர்க்கும் எமது மனமார்ந்த மங்களாசாஸனங்களை ஸாதித்து மகிழ்கிறோம்.

(ஸ்ரீவானமாமலை ராமானுஜ ஜீயர்)

FOREWORD

The Volume IV of 108 Vaishnava Divyadesams was brought to me by Shree Bhaktavatsalam and he on behalf of Miss. M.S. Ramesh, requested me to go through this valuable big volume. I could read supptuously major portion of this verify useful book and I found elaborate details of Divyakshetras that are of Pandya Nadu. At the beginning itself, in the chapter on Peria Thiruvadi, I found many an interesting information of Shree Garuda. Thereafter the chapters dealing with Divya Desams certainly provide us with almost all essential information of those holy kshetras. The untired efforts taken for gathering these very valuable informations by the author Miss. M.S. Ramesh have I hope - Surely become expectedly fruitful and are really praise worthy. As the author has mentioned in her preface, the rest Divyadesams will find their places in a fitting manner in the next volume, which will be prepared and published soon. Our wholehearted Mangalasasanams to the author and our prayer to Shree Varamangai Nachiyar and Shree Deivanayagan for showering all prosperity on her.

I wish to express my happiness and appreciation to all concerned Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams officials, who are the publication authorities of this very valuable book.

Sd/- Sri Vanamamalai Ramanuja Jeer,
Sri Vanamamalai Mutt,
Member,
Tamilnadu Temple Administration Board.

PREFACE

This book is the fourth volume in the series covering the 108 Vaishnavite Divyadesams. Volume I dealt with the divya desams in Thondai Nadu. Volume II dealt with the 21 Vaishnavite Divya Desams in Chola Nadu. Volume III dealt with the balance of 21 Divya Desams in Chola Nadu along with the 2 Divya Desams of Nadu Nadu. This volume deals with the 18 Divya Desams in Pandya Nadu.

The manner of presentation of the material is the same as was followed in the earlier volumes. First the mythological stories i.e., the sthala purana of the Divya Desams is related followed by brief account of the epigraphical highlights as found from the inscriptions available in these temples. In conclusion the mangala sasana pasurams sung by the alvars on the Perumal of each Divya Desam is presented along with its meaning.

As was the case with the other volumes, in this book also I have received unstinted co-operation from many of my colleagues both with reference to collection of material, stenography, proof reading etc. I will be failing in my duty if I do not place on record my deep debt of gratitude to all of them. First and foremost I sincerely thank my family members who stood by me and encouraged me to complete this job. I must make special mention in this connection of the sincere unstinted co-operation extended to me by my friends Shri Velu, Vaidyanathan, Jayachandran, Bakthavatchalam, Ramanujam and Shri Thiruvengadathan. They spared no efforts in collecting published as well as unpublished material and photographs relating to these divya desams. I have no hesitation in saying that but for their help, I would have found it quite difficult to visit these Divya Desams covered in this book. I wish to now mention the efficient excellent secretarial assistance extended to me by Mr. Ramji. Due to the cheerful, willing and intelligent manner in which he took the dictation and the perfect manner in which he did the transcription, my task became easier. My thanks are also due to Sri V.N.Srinivasan who was very helpful in collecting some rare printed materials on Garudalwar for my use. Frankly when I decide to have a general chapter on Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda, in this volume I was wondering as to where I could gather the

relevant material. It was my sister Dr. M.S. Lakshmikumari and Shri V.N.Srinivasan who visited a number of Sanskrit and Oriental Libraries and collected material relevant for getting a comprehensive picture of the stories connected with Peria Thiruvadi. My humble and sincere thanks are to the two of them. I must also publicly acknowledge my continued thanks to Prof. Ananthan for painstakingly going through my drafts and correcting the English idioms and usages. Mr. M.N. Krishnaswamy, Publisher of Ramanuja Vani continued to be of immense strength to me with his vast knowledge about these divya desams and the available religious literature connected with these divya desams.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not place on record here my deep sense of gratitude to Sri Sthalasayanathuraivar swamigal who patiently explained to me the pasurams and helped in selecting specific mangalasasana pasurams for each Divya Kshetrams. The nuances of the meaning of these pasurams were made clear with his explanation.

With the advent of modern technology, printing is being done now using Desk Top Publishing Technique. The material has been provided to the publishers on computer floppies. My sister Miss. Revathy Sriram cheerfully and in her usual efficient manner took charge of this aspect of the work. I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to her. My thanks are also due to Miss. Lakshmi and Mrs. Lavanya who helped in keying in the material to the floppy. In this volume Miss lakshmi and mr. Ramji took complete charge of writing the pasurams in Tamil. My thanks are due to them. I am indeed fortunate to have received assistance from all these people.

With this volume I have presented the material relating to 82 out of the 108 Divya Desams. The next volume i.e., Volume-V will deal with the two divya desams in Andhra Pradesh viz., Tirupati and Ahobilam and two divya desams which cannot be seen in this world viz., Thirupparkadal and Thiru Paramapadam. I hope with divine grace I will be able to bring out the next volume also soon.

M.S. RAMESH I.A.S.

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**Dedicated
To my Parents
Smt.Padmavathy Srirama Iyengar
and
Prof. Srirama Iyengar**

108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS - IV

INTRODUCTION - PERIA THIRUVADI

This volume is the fourth in the series dealing with the 108 Vaishnavite divya desams. Each volume covers a specific geographical area and in each of these volumes, I have presented a chapter covering a topic of general interest in vaishnavism. The first volume contained a chapter on temples, its significance and structural details etc. It also had one chapter on the traits of Mahavishnu as evidenced from Vishnu Sahasranama. The second volume had one general chapter on Mahalakshmi. In the third volume I have presented a general chapter on the Panchayudhams of Mahavishnu. This volume which is the fourth in the series covers the divya desams in Pandya Nadu. In this, I propose to have a general chapter on Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda.

Garuda is variously known as Pakshiraja, Vainatheya, Suparna, Garuthman, Peria Thiruvadi, Vinathasudha, Vishnuvahanana, Nagantaka, Kasyapeya, Vinathathmaja.

Garuda is usually referred to as Peria Thiruvadi as against Hanuman who is referred to as Siriya Thiruvadi. While Hanuman had the honour of carrying and serving God in His Ramavatharam only, Garuda was the vahanam for Perumal and did kainkaryam to Perumal in all the manifestations of God. He is the eternal chariot for Mahavishnu. This confers on him a certain greatness and unequalled unquestioned status. In Tamil this is referred to as “ பெருமை மிக்க சீததி ”

“Perumai mikka stithi” literally translated it would mean that it is a situation which is worthy of great praise. Hence it is that Garuda got the name Periya Thiruvadi as against Siriya Thiruvadi i.e. small, comparatively small position as a vahana which Hanuman had during Ramavataram.

Garuda is given generally a higher status in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. We find that as one crosses Tiruchy, the vigraham of Garuda grows in size and the worship offered and importance attached to the worship of Garuda is more than elsewhere in the country. The temple at Srirangam which is one of the premier vaishnavite temples, there is a huge figure

of Garuda. This has been referred to in detail in Volume II while dealing with the Srirangam divya desam., The story goes that the Perumal at Srirangam at the behest of Brahma was going to Satyaloka and asked Garuda to wait at that spot till He returned!! The other divya desam where Garuda has got a prominent role to play is at Nachiyar Koil. This divya desam has been dealt with in detail in Volume III. There the stone Garuda has life even today as is evident from the inexplicable fact that when the stone Garuda is taken out in a procession at the first stage, four people are able to lift the idol! But later it has to be carried by sixty four people. As to how and why this weight increases is not known. Yet another of the divya desam where Garuda has a prominent role to play is Thirukkannamangai. The story of that divya desam is dealt with in Volume III. In Thirukkannamangai regular abishekam is done for Garuda who is seen in a standing pose. He is said to be a great varaprasadhi. In Kanchipuram dealt with in Volume I, Garuda utsavam is the most important festival. The story connected with it and as to how God during the Garuda Sevai gave a momentary darshan and continues to give such darshan even today to the great devotee Doddacharya of Sholinghur is related in the chapter dealing with Kanchipuram. In and around Thirunangoor there are eleven divya desams. These have been dealt with in Volume II. In those divya desams one unique religious festival that is celebrated is the Thirunangaor eleven Garudaseva where the Perumals of all the eleven divya desams in and around Thirunangoor are visited by Thirumangai Alwar and his mangalasaana pasuram recited and then all the Perumals assemble in a particular spot and a unique Garuda Sevai for all the eleven Perumals celebrated. That has been detailed as stated earlier in Volume II while dealing with the story of Thirunangoor eleven divya desams.

Yet another place where the Garuda utsavam has got a special significance is in the Navatirupathi in Tirunelveli district. This has been dealt with in detail in this volume in the later chapters. It is believed that the Garuda seva of Navatirupathi where the Perumals of eight divyadesams come to Alwar Thirunagari to visit Nammalwar, the great vaishnavite saint was the model on which the Thirunangoor eleven Garudaseva

was formulated. Needless to add the Garudaseva in Tirupathi during the Brahmotsavam is even today the most important event in the brahmotsavam festival. It is said that when the Perumal is taken out on the Garuda vahanam on the Garuda utsavam day there is a big chain worn round the neck of Perumal which also covers the neck of Garuda. It is said that such a decoration which is common to Perumal and Garuda is not seen elsewhere. In brief, the importance given to Garuda is more in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu.

In this context, it is interesting to relate an event that takes place in Nepal which is the only Hindu kingdom in the entire world. In Nepal Garuda Naga yuddham is an important festival. At that time, it is said that the idol of Garuda actually sweats and perspires. That perspiration is gently wiped with a cloth and that holy piece of cloth is taken by the priest and given to the King of Nepal. The King keeps it safe. It is believed that every piece of yarn in that cloth is preserved and used whenever any citizen is unfortunate enough as to be bitten by a snake! If a person is bitten by a snake, a yarn from that cloth is taken and tied round the limb where the snake bit. Immediately, the harm from the poisonous bite is said to disappear. This festival in Nepal is one of the famous festivals.

In Telugu language, there is a well known drama known as Yakshaganam. This entire drama deals with the greatness of Suparna.

In the entire south of Vindhya, there is a festival known as Nagapanchami. This festival falls in the month of Avani during Suklapaksha. At that time, prayers are offered to Garuda and it is believed to be the avatara day of Garuda. It is popularly known as Naga Panchami.

In the following few pages, I propose to present the qualities of Garuda and relate his story along with some of the puranic incidents in which he played a prominent part.

Garuda is regarded as Veda Swaroopi. Narayana who is the Veda himself is seated on Garuda who is the form of the Veda. In Sama Veda the part dealing with Sama is known as

Sthoman. That Sthoman is believed to be the athma of Garuda. The eyes of Garuda are said to be Gayathri Samam. His head is Thrivruth samam. His very name is Yajur Vedam. His limbs viz. the hands, legs and other parts of the body are compared to Gayathri chandas. His body is Vamadevyasamam. Of the two wings one is Bruhat Samam and the other is Radantara Samam. Thus, the various parts of Garuda's body represent the different parts of the Vedas. The Vedas are dharma swaroorpi. Garuda is Veda Swaroorpi. Dharma is the main component of victory. As such Garuda who is dharma swaroorpi is the sure path for all victories i.e. jaya. Garuda never knew what it was to be defeated. He is ever victorious. Garuda is known for his gnanam and bala i.e. knowledge and strength. He has the ability to bear everything and to protect everything. Paravasudeva in Paramapadam has four vyuha forms. Each vyuha form has got two divya gunas. It is held that the vyuha form of Perumal viz. Shankarshana is Garuda himself. That Shankarshana is known for two qualities which are gnana and bala. Thus it is that Garuda symbolises the two qualities of Perumal viz. gnana and bala.

Garuda is the master of five types of vayus i.e. air inside our body. The five types of vayu in our body are pranam, apanam, samanam, udanam and vyanan. Garuda is believed to control all these five vayus in our body. Hence it is that Garudamantram is regarded as the life giving force to our body. The Isvara Samhita says that Garuda mantram will help in one's education. It will make others agree with our view point, destroy one's enemies, stun the opponents, bestow happiness. It will confer on a person the skill to talk well and unlimited capacity and ability to understand fundamental philosophies. It is also said that whatever benefit or effect is received by repeating the Dwadasakshara mantra (Perumal's mantram i.e. Sri Vasudeva mantram) will be got by doing dyana of the Garuda mantram as well. The Garuda mantram is a five lettered mantram. It is known as Panchavarni.

Garuda has, like Perumal, four vyuha forms. Just as Perumal has got four colours in four yugas, this chariot of Perumal has also got four colours in his body. Garuda has a

black face, his arms are of the colour of kumkum, his thighs are white as sun, his feet are yellow like gold.

Garuda is regarded as Indra among the birds. He is referred to as Pakshi Indran.

Garuda dhrushti is held to be very auspicious. If the eyes of Garuda set their gaze on a person, he will definitely be assured of victory. This is illustrated in Ramayana when Perumal had to fight with the asura Malyavan and also later during the Rama-Ravana yuddham when the Nagastaram was let loose on Perumal and temporarily Rama and Lakshmana were tied up by the Nagastaram it was only the dhrushti of Garuda which released them. Similarly, when Rama fought with Malyavan when Garuda's gaze fell upon the asura, Valmiki says that Malyavan was like a piece of cotton that got blown away by the wind.

Garuda glance (parvai) is said to be a beauty by itself. If one has to describe it in one word it is sukshma dhrushti. Nothing can escape that microscopic vision. Garuda parvai is so efficacious. Because of this parvai i.e. sight, Garuda is also known as Darkshyan. Garuda parvai is classified into five types. They are keram, spararam, triyak, artham and athaha. Keram is a type of parvai which will bless the beneficiary. This parvai is one where Garuda looks at one from the corner of his eyes. Spararam is one where the eyes are wide open. Triyak is one where the eyes have a diagonal look. In artham, he has half opened eyes. Athaha is the type of the parvai which Garuda adopts when he is having Perumal on his shoulders. Keram confers good. Spararam bodes evil. Triyak will save the country. Artham will destroy all the evils and diseases Arthaha will confer enlightenment. As stated earlier, when Garuda has Perumal seated on his shoulders, he is believed to have turned his eyes in such a manner that he sees the foot of the Perumal when seated on him with half the eyes and the other half he is doing dhyanam.

Garuda is believed to be capable of bestowing on a person eight types of Aisvarya i.e. sampath viz. wealth and prosperity. The eight types of sampath are anima, mahima, lakima, karima,

esithvam, vasithvam, prapti and prakamyam.

Garuda is the possessor of six divya gunam viz. gnanam, balam, Aisvaryam, viryam, sakthi and tejas. These are the very qualities which are possessed by God. This only lends credence to the theory that Garuda is so closely identified with Perumal himself.

Garuda is the embodiment of sapthaswaras. The seven swaras are nishatham, rushabam, gantaram, shedjam, madhyamam, daivatham and panchamam.

Garudadvani is even more auspicious than Garuda parvai. A ragam in carnatic music is itself known as Garudadvani. Garudadvani is sama ganam. It is said that the good that flows when all the mangala vadhyaams are played can be had through one Garudadvani. That is why while doing aradhana to Perumal, the bell will usually have on its top as its head the figure of Garuda or that of Sri Sudarshana. When samprokashanam is done for a temple, Garudadvani is the noise made by the big bells. Similarly, during marriages, Garudadvani is played when the important event in the marriage takes place i.e. mangala sutra dharana.

The ornaments of Garuda are eight serpents: viz., in his left hand, he wears Adisesha as the bangle. Vasuki is his yagnopaveetham. His waist thread is Dakshkan, the serpent. He wears like a garland karkodam. His right ear is adorned with padman as the ear ring. The left ear has Mahapadman as ear ring. His hair is adorned by Sankhapalan, the serpent. On his right shoulder is Gulikan. Thus, he has eight nagas as his abaranas. These eight serpents which are worn as ornaments by Garuda are known as Mahanagas. Kalidasa also in his Raghuvamsam says that Garuda is the person who keeps under control the eight maha serpents.

While Garuda is the enemy of all snakes, there are a few outstanding exceptions. For example, the chariot reins of Sun God is a snake. Shiva's bow string is a snake viz, pinagam, Perumal has as his divine couch a snake viz. Adisesha. These three snakes are never in any danger from Garuda. There is

also an old proverb which illustrates this fact. It is said that once these three snakes made kind enquiries from Garuda. Garuda then replied, if you remain in the places where you are, you will be happy. This was a veiled way of saying that these three snakes were safe only because Garuda has given his word to their masters that he would not hurt those snakes. The Sun God is said to have obtained the safety blessing for his chariot rein through Aruna, the charioteer who is none other than the brother of Garuda. Siva got an assurance of safety to his bowstring through Kasyapa, the father of Garuda. So far as Adisesha is concerned, he is assured of safety as both Adisesha and Garuda are nityasuris doing kainkaryam to the same Perumal.

Garuda is a nityasuri residing in Vaikuntam along with Paravasudeva. The three important nityasuris in Vaikuntam are Ananthan, Garudan and Visvaksenar. Ananthan i.e. Adisesha is the couch (asanam for Perumal) In the north eastern corner (esanyam) is seen Senai Mudaliyar or Visvaksenar sitting along with Sutravathi devi. He holds in his hand a golden cane. Right in front of Perumal stays Garuda doing Hastanjali seva to Perumal. Alavandar in his 'Stotra Ratnam' said that Garuda does various types of kainkaryam to Perumal. He is his dasan (servant), nanban (friend), vahanam (chariot), asanam (seat), kodi (flag), melkatti (vithanam i.e. the cloth that is spread over the head of the Lord as a roof whenever He is taken out into the streets in procession) and visiri (fan). These eight kainkaryams are mentioned in Stotra Rathnam as follows: "Daksha saka vahanam asanam dhwajo yakthae vithanam vyajanam"

Garuda is always positioned in front of Vaikuntanatha. It is said that this location also has got certain strategic significance. Desikan in his Garuda Panchasath while referring to this positioning says that Garuda acts as a mirror standing in front of God. In the mortal world whenever the rulers set out on their vijaya yathra, they look at themselves before the mirror, wearing all the weapons and dresses. It is said Perumal also looks at Peria Thiruvadi as if he is the mirror which reflects all his great qualities before He sets out on his mercy missions. Human rulers are able to see only their physical body in the mirror. Desikan says that Garuda who acts as a mirror reflects the

divya athma swaroopa i.e. the kalyana gunams of Perumal. It is also said that there is another reason why Garuda is seated in front of the Perumal. Perumal is adorned with kousthuba mani on His chest. This kousthuba mani emerged out of Parkadal when the milky ocean was churned. When the parkadal was churned, the first to emerge was the deadly poison viz. halahala. Kousthuba mani came only later. Thus kousthuba mani had some association with halahala and so may be having some viscious sambandam. It is said that the moment this precious stone adorned the chest of Perumal, its viscious sambandam if any would have been lost. However to ensure that there is no untoward slip and that it never reverts to its earlier association with poison, Garuda is standing in front of the Perumal and as vishahari (i.e. the enemy of poison) ensures that whatever poison is left in koustubamani is also made ineffective. This is said to be the significance of Garuda standing in front of Perumal.

Garuda is usually adorned with a red bit of cloth. Jasmine, marikozhundhu, davanam and sampangi are the flowers that should be used while offering aradhana to Garuda. As Garuda is addressed as "Yuvati Janapriya namaha" women also are permitted to do archana to Garuda. When women offer worship, they can even do kumkumam archana to Garuda. It is not without significance that in Tirukkannamangai the devotees offer a nine yards sari to adorn Garuda as a veshti. Offering archana in the evening is said to be more effective.

Suparna is one among the many names of Garuda. Perumal is also addressed as Suparna, thus both the Perumal and Garuda share one name. In Vishnu Sahasranama, the word suparna comes twice while addressing the Perumal.

One of the interesting facts is that while Garuda is vahana himself, he has as his vahanam vayu. There is no other situation where a vahanam has another vahanam. But Garuda is always referred to vayu vahana i.e. one who has wind as his chariot. Even in Vishnu Sahasranama, the word Suparno vayu vahana is found. Garuda ashtothram begins and ends with the words Sri Vayu vahanaya namaha.

Dhyana of Garuda is regarded as an antidote for snake poison. In Garuda Purana it is said that a person who wears the image of Garuda made from a tooth of a bear would not be bitten by serpent. The Garuda purana also says that one who desires to protect himself from serpents should draw a figure of Garuda in his house. At the mouth of the figure, the letter Om should be written. At the throat the word Kuru should be written. At the anklets one should place kunda flowers. At the foot one should write the word swaha. If this is done, it is believed that serpent will not come near the house. Another method that is adopted to save oneself from the snakes is to have a lotus having eight petals and on it write the mantram Om Suvarna reke kukkuta Vighraha rubini swaha (Hail you have the colour of gold and having a cock's body). It is said that water which is used to wash this device causes the snake poison itself to vanish i.e. a person who is bitten by snake should be given a bath with water from this device. Others believe that in the ear of the person bitten by the snake one should recite the mantram "Om Hrim Hraun Hrim Phirundayai Swaha" and the poison will become ineffective. Thus, there are many mantras associated with Garuda in order to circumvent the danger from the snake bite. The Garuda upanishad mentions the following mantra which when repeated with devotion would obviate the evil effects of the bite of a poisonous snake. The mantram is as follows:

Chandra mandala shangasaha

Surya mandala mushtikaha

Pruthvi mandala mrudram

Srimaha Garudaya namaha

There is also theory that Dhanvanthri, the God of medicine is himself the desciple of Garuda.

It is said that it was Garuda who taught the Hayagriva mantram to Swami Desikan. He also gave the idol of Hayagriva to Desikan. Once Sri Desikan had been to Thiruvahindrapuram in South Arcot District. He sat on the Oushadagiri hill and did tapas chanting the Garuda mantram. In that Siddhi kshetram

on the banks of Garuda nadhi he did tapas on Oushadagiri. This hill is on the front of Devanatha sannidhi in Thirikoilur (for details relating to this divyadesam see volume III). On the hill there is an Azhagiya singa sannidhi. There Desikan sat under a peepal tree and did tapas. Pleased with his tapas, Peria Thiruvadi appeared before him and it was he who gave upadesam of the Hayagriva mantram to Desikan and asked Desikan to worship Hyagriva. He also gave him the divya mangala vigraha of Hayagriva and asked him to worship that Perumal everyday. This particular incident when Garuda did upadesam of mantram to Desikan is even today celebrated as a great festival in Thirukoilur. Desikan had darshan of Perumal only after repeating the Hayagriva mantram taught to him by Garuda.

Garuda dandakam composed by Swami Desikan is another efficacious prayer that is offered to Garuda. There is a story as to how this Garuda Dandakam itself was composed.

Sri Desikan was once staying at Kanchipuram. Desikan had earlier got the title "Sarva tantra suthanthirar" from consort Herself. A snake charmer however met Desikan and challenged him saying that he will let loose the snakes that he was having in his basket and only if Desikan was able to control those snakes would he accept the fact that he deserved the title conferred on Desikan by consort. If Desikan failed to control the snakes, the snake charmer felt he should give up his title. Desikan first tried to ignore the snake charmer's challenge. But at the same time, he wanted to ensure that the title given to him by goddess is not allowed to be questioned so casually by this ordinary snake charmer. He therefore went and sat near an ant hill near Varadarajaswami temple. This ant hill was the home of snakes. He drew seven lines on the ground in front of him and asked the snake charmer to let loose the snakes from the basket. The snake charmer threw the snakes on the ground. All the venomous snakes could not even cross those seven lines drawn by Desikan, seeing this, the snake charmer let loose Sankapalan, the most vicious snake that he was having with him to eek out his daily living. This Sankhapalan snake was able to cross the seven lines drawn by Desikan. It came near

Swami Desikan and was about to strike. At that time, Swami Desikan did dyana on Garuda and recited prayers praising Peria Thiruvadi. Suddenly from nowhere from up above the sky, a Garuda came swooping on to the ground. It caught Sankhapalan in its beak and flew back into the sky. The snake charmer then realised that the Swami in front of him was indeed very great and holy. He fell at his feet and begged him to return the viscious snake as that was his only means of living. He accepted the defeat. Sri Desikan immediately composed a Dhandakam in praise of Garuda. Suparna then dropped Sankhapalan from the sky. This is the interesting story as to how Garuda Dandakam was composed.

Let us now turn to relating the story of Garuda's birth and his leelas. Kasyapa, grand son of Brahma and son of Marichi had two wives by name Vinatha and Kaduru. One day, Kasyapa who was pleased with the services rendered by Vinatha and Kaduru and asked them to select any boon they desired. Kaduru chose to have thousand nagas as her children and Vinatha chose to have two sons. After some time, Kaduru laid thousand eggs and Vinatha two eggs. Both of them kept their eggs in a hot pots. In the 500th year, the eggs of Kaduru hatched and thousand nagas of various kinds emerged. But Vinatha's eggs did not hatch as yet. She became impatient. One day she broke open one of the eggs eagerly. Alas, a half grown child stepped out. That child was Aruna. Aruna was angry that Vinatha was impatient and did not wait for him to grow into a full child. He cursed that Vinatha would become a slave of Kaduru. He also granted her redemption from the curse saying that after another five hundred years, the remaining egg will hatch and a son will be born who will have exceptional power and would liberate her from slavery. Saying this Aruna rose to the sky where he became the charioteer to Sun God. As predicted, after 500 years, the other egg broke itself open and hatched Garuda with blazing effulgence. Seeing this dazzling light, the devas thought that Agni deva was the cause for this brilliance. Agni deva denied having anything to do with this brightness. Later they discovered that it was Garuda who was so bright. They blessed him liberally and asked him to control his effulgence till such time as it is needed later.

Let us now turn to a story before Garuda was born. One day Vinatha and Kaduru were having a discussion about the churning of the milky ocean and the emergence of Uchaisravas the horse of Indra from that ocean of milk. Kaduru and Vinatha had a dispute regarding the colour of the tail of that horse. Kaduru claimed it was black while Vinatha claimed it was white. They decided to test the colour the next day by seeing for themselves the tail. Kaduru said that if Vinatha lost, she should become her slave, and if Vinatha won, Kaduru would become her slave. The wily Kaduru wanted to ensure that she would be the master of Vinatha. That night she requested her children viz. the snakes to cover the tail of the horse completely so that when she and Vinatha come to see it the tail would be black and Vinatha would loose the bet and become the slave of Kaduru. Things happened as anticipated by Kaduru and Vinatha became the slave for Kaduru.

It was at this time Garuda was born. He also became the slave for Kaduru and her sons. It is said that one day Kaduru and her naga sons ordered Vinatha to carry them to Naga residence in the middle of the oceans called Ramaniyaka. Accordingly, Vinatha carried Kaduru on her shoulders and Garuda carried the sons of Kaduru. Garuda resented having to act like slave. It is said that he carried the nagas so high up in the sky that he flew upto the orbit of Sun. The naga children fainted due to the excessive heat. On the request of Kaduru Indra sent heavy rains and the nagas regained consciousness. It is said that the place where the nagas lost their consciousness and Indra rained is the present Nagalaya.

Many are the leelas of Garuda during his childhood. Some of the leelas described by Swami Desikan in his Garuda Pan-chasat makes interesting reading. It is said that when Garuda used to fly in the sky the breeze from the flapping of his wings used to break the huge mountains. The oceans would get churned up by the disturbance in the air caused by the fluttering of the wings of Garuda. His flight used to upset the positioning of the stars as also the seats of the devas. Sometimes, he would fly from pathalam i.e. hell upto Brahmaloaka as if it was pure and simple game. It is said that once he obtained the

permission of his father Kasyapa and broke with ease one of the branches of the tree known as Rohanam. This tree had a spread of nearly thousand miles. But Garuda the young bird carried the broken branch with ease and planted it on another mountain, this incident is also reported in Mahabharatham in Adiparvam in 21st adyayam. Desikan with his poetic flight of fancy says that the stars which were loosened from their position from the sky by the flutter of the wings of Garuda used to fall at his feet as if they were flowers offered in worship or that they would form a lusturous chain and become necklace round Garuda's neck. In one place Desikan also says that Garuda spread his wings wide and fluttered them prior to flying to pathala. The wind which he disturbed by the flutter is said to have separated the waves in the ocean and created path to pathala (vide stanza 29 Garuda Panchasath).

As Garuda was growing up he was extremely pained at the pitiable plight of his mother. One day therefore he asked Kaduru as to what was the price that she and her children demanded so as to free Vinatha, his mother. Kaduru demanded amruth from Devaloka as she and her sons wanted to drink the elixir of eternal life. Garuda however felt that no price was too much to pay for releasing his mother from her serfdom. He told his mother about his decision to fly to Devaloka and bring the amruth kalasa. He asked his mother to advise him as to how he could feed himself till he reached Devaloka. Vinatha told him that enroute he could eat the nishadas that he would meet on his way to Devaloka on the island known as Nisadalaya. She also warned him against eating on any account the brahmins who might be there at Nisadalaya. When Garuda asked as to how he could distinguish brahmins from others, Vinatha replied that if he were to eat a brahmin his throat would burn like fire. Vinatha blessed Garuda and invoked the protection of vayu, sun and moon gods. Agni and other devas and asked him to proceed on his chosen task.

Garuda started. He reached Nisadalaya and consumed whole lots of nisadas. By mistake a brahmin and his wife also get into his throat. As predicted Garuda felt their presence immediately as his throat started to burn. It is said that Garuda

immediately spat them out and continued on his journey. However, as he felt hungry again he asked advice from his father Kasyapa who was engaged in doing tapas in a forest. Kasyapa advised him to go to a pool where an elephant and a tortoise were living for long as enemies. Kasyapa said that these who were earlier brothers known as Vibhavasu and Supratika. They were quarreling over their paternal wealth. Once the argument reached such a heated stage that Vibhavasu cursed Supratika to become a elephant. In retaliation, Supratika cursed that Vibhavasu should become a tortoise. Both of them were living on the banks of a river and continuing their quarrels even in their new forms. Kasyapa therefore asked his son Garuda to eat both of them and satisfy his hunger. He blessed that his journey to collect amruth be successful.

Garuda received this advice from his father and flew to the tank bund. He saw the elephant and tortoise there. He lifted them with his talons and flew in the sky carrying them also. As the flapping of his wings uprooted many a tree, Garuda had to go searching for a convenient place to perch to eat his food. Enroute he saw a big tree with a spread of thousand miles, but as soon as Garuda sat on a branch of the tree it broke. Unknown to Garuda on that branch were the sages called Balakhilyas. They were doing tapas with their heads hanging down. Realising his serious mistake in having disturbed the penance of the sages, Garuda caught the broken branch also in his beak, flew back to his father Kasyapa who was doing penance on the mount Gandhamadana. Kasyapa apologised to Balakhilyas for the unwitting act of his son and explained to them as to how he was going to Devaloka to get amruth. The Balakhilyas accepted the apology of Kasyapa. What is more they were pleased that Garuda was going to take something from Indra. There was an earlier enmity between Balakhilyas and Indra. They therefore blessed Garuda. Garuda ate the elephant and the tortoise and flew to Devaloka.

It will be worthwhile here to digress a little and explain as to why the Balakhilyas had enmity with Indra. The Balakhilyas are mahatapasvis. They were the children of manasaputra of Brahma viz. Krutu. Their mother is Kriya. Krutu had 60000 children. They were demunitive in size. It is said that the

Balakhilyas were born out of the hair particles of Brahma thus indicating their thumb kin size. They would move about in groups. They would be hanging with their hands down from some of the branches in banyan and bamboo trees. Once Kasyapa was doing yaga praying for a son viz. a progeny. Indra and all the other devas and rishis came for that yaga to help Kasyapa. Indra and the Balkhilyas were bringing samithu (small sticks for yaga). Because of his size Indra was able to break a big branch of one such samithu tree and brought it to the yagasalai. The Balkhilyas on the other hand because of their diminutive size were with difficulty carrying small sticks (twigs). Even as Indra was looking down at them, the diminutive forms slipped and fell. Indra laughed. The Balakhilyas got angry at this arrogance of Indra. They therefore decided then, and there to do another yaga and instal another Indra. At that stage, Indra got worried. He fell at the feet of Kasyapa and asked him to intercede on his behalf with the Balkhilyas. Kasyapa then met the Balkhilyas. He pacified them. He said that Indra was created by Brahma and installed by Brahma and it may not therefore be proper to violate that order of creation and create another Indra. As a compromise Kasyapa asked the Balkhilyas to give the benefit of their yaga to him. He also assured them that the Indra who is to be created by yagam could become the Indra for birds. The Balkhilyas agreed and blessed Kasyapa to have a worthy son who would defeat Indra. Indra felt relieved as at least temporarily he had obtained stay from the wrath of the Balkhilyas. Thus, the fruit of the yaga undertaken by the Balkhilyas was transferred to Kasyapa. It was then that Vinatha had her child. That child was Garuda who was enroute to taking the amruth kalasam which is in the custody of Indra. So, the Balkhilyas blessed Garuda and wished him good speed in humbling Indra and taking away the amritha kalasa.

To revert back to the main story, Garuda having eaten the elephant and the tortoise proceeded to Devaloka. It is said that Indra and other devas were getting worried. Garuda approached the pot of nectar. Visvakarma tried to prevent Garuda. But Garuda defeated him with ease. It is said that dust storm raised by the fluttering of the wings of Garuda blinded everybody, that devas Indra, Moon, Sun and all the others tried to protect

the amrith kalasam. But Garuda defeated all of them. The pot of nectar was kept safe in the middle with two wheels rotating incessantly round the pot. The two wheels had sharp edges which would cut into mincemeat anybody who tried to lay hands on the pot. Besides the wheels were two monstrous looking serpents who never closed their eyes and were ever watchful to prevent intruders. Garuda blinded those eyes of the serpents by the dust storm that he raised with the flapping of his wings; further he pierced them in the middle with his beak. He converted himself into a tiny shape and went unharmed through the spokes. He lifted the pot of nectar and rose to the sky with his booty. Indra let loose vajrayutha. But it had no effect on Garuda. Watching all this, Vishnu was so pleased with the bravery and tremendous achievement of Garuda that he then and there asked Garuda to choose any boon. Garuda requested Vishnu to make him as His vahana and to make him immortal. Vishnu granted both the wishes. Garuda also requested that the flag held by Vishnu should always have Garuda motif on it. Thus it was that Vishnu got the Garuda flag and Garuda vahanam.

Finding that his vajrayutha was ineffective, Indra realised the greatness of Garuda. Vajrayutha as is known was made out of the back bone of Dadichi, the famous rishi. Garuda felt that ignominy should not be associated with the ayutha made out of the back bone of such a great sage. So out of the deference to the rishi and not out of the deference to Indra, Garuda decided to allow two of his feathers to fall as a consequence of Vajrayutha touching his body. Indra then requested Garuda to be his friend. He wanted the pot of nectar to be returned. Garuda said that he had no objection provided he could release his mother Vinatha from her slavery. He explained the whole history. He made it clear that if by some magic Indra could get the pot back, he would have no objection provided he got the pot after Vinatha was released. Garuda said that the nagas had cheated his mother and made her as their slave and that she will be freed only with this pot of nectar. However, if the pot of nectar could be taken away from the nagas by any act of cheating, Garuda said he would have no objection. Having agreed to this, Garuda took the pot of nectar to the nagas. He placed the pot on the

dharba grass spread on the ground. He suggested, as advised by Indra, that the nagas should take a purificatory bath before tasting the amrith and that as he had brought the pot of nectar his mother should be immediately released from her slavery without waiting for the nagas to have the taste of the amruth. Kaduru and her children agreed. They placed the pot on the dharba grass and went to the tank to have a purificatory bath. By the time they returned, Indra carried away the pot of nectar back to Devaloka. The disappointed nagas on return from the tank licked the dharba grass on which the amrith kalasm was placed on earth. That is why the serpents have their tongues which are cloven into two because the sharp dharba grass cut their tongue into two. From that day, the nagas became double tongued (dujihvas). Garuda redeemed his mother from slavery and the pot of nectar went back to where it belonged to viz. the devas.

Another interesting anectode connected with this trip of Garuda to Devaloka is also worth relating. It is said that on his way to Devaloka, Garuda rested on a fig tree. That fig tree is called Subhadra in Valmiki Ramayanam. As related earlier, a branch of the tree had broken when Garuda sat on it. As directed by Kasyapa, Garuda had taken the broken branch on which the Balkhilyas were hanging doing their tapas. He deposited it in the sea. The spot where he deposited the branch became an island. It was this island which later became today's Lanka.

There are a number of other interesting stories connected with Garuda's life. A few of the interesting ones will now be related:

Garuda always treated the serpents as his enemies. When he was bringing the amrutha kalasam, he had obtained the blessing of Indra to eat the nagas for food. Having released his mother, Garuda decided to have his feast. He entered Pathala and started eating the nagas in great numbers. Here again, the description given by Desikan while explaining the visit of Garuda to Pathala makes excellent poetic reading. He says Garuda started flying towards Pathalam. The snakes there wondered whether it was the thunderbolt which was falling or

was it Surya mandalam itself which was coming down or was it the electrical energy that is in the ocean which is coming down or was it Meru parvatham which was falling down? Finally they realised it was Garuda. They started shivering as they knew that their end were nearing. The serpents therefore approached Garuda and agreed to offer themselves daily in instalments so as to avoid indiscriminate killing by Garuda. Garuda accepted this proposal. The nagas suggested to Garuda that they would conduct a sarpa bali, a sacrifice of serpents and give the food got out of the bali to Garuda. Garuda agreed. Accordingly everyday one naga would go to Garuda along with the food got out the bali. Kalia the fierce serpent did not agree to this. He would not accept Garuda as the victor. Garuda therefore challenged Kalia to a fight. The fight took place in the river Kalindhi which was Kalia's home. It is said that during the fight, the lashing of Garuda's wings raised the level of Kalindhi upto the sky and it drenched a sage by name Soubhari who was doing tapas on the banks of Kalindhi. Soubhari therefore cursed that the body of Garuda be shattered into a thousand pieces if ever he entered that area again in future. Thus it was that Garuda could not enter Kalindhi river and kalia was safe so long as he continued to stay in that place.

King Sagara of Solar dynasty was married to Sumati, the elder sister of Garuda. It is said that 60,000 sons were born to them. Once Sagara was performing the Aswamedha yagam. As per the programme, a horse is let loose and all the areas that it covers without any objection from the respective rulers will belong to the king who let loose the horse. If some one were to stop the horse, the warriors will fight and whoever wins will become master of the area. When King Sagara sent the horse, two demons intercepted the horse and took the horse to Pathalam. Finding that his horse did not return, Sagara sent his sons in search of the horse. They searched the entire earth. Finally they reached the asram of Kapila. They did not know who he was. They found the horse there. They accused him of cheating them. The tapas of Kapila was broken. He opened his eyes and immediately the 60,000 children got burnt and became ashes. After a long time a grandson of Sagara Bagiratha went in search of his 60,000 fathers. Garuda then met him and told

him that his pitrus were cursed by Kapila and the curse would be redeemed only if waters from Ganges was brought down to earth. Bagiratha went in search of Ganga. Ganga then made it clear that if she were to come down to earth, the burden of her fall would not be borne by any animate or inanimate object on earth. It was then that she first descended on to the head of Siva who henceforth came to be known as Gangadharan and then she broke into seven branches from Siva's hair and then came down to earth. Ganga is also known as Bagirathi as she came down to earth in response to the prayers of Bagiratha. Thus it was that Garuda was responsible in a way for bringing Ganga to earth.

Yet another story connected with Garuda explains how he helped Kalava rishi. Kalava rishi was the disciple of Viswamitra. When it was time for him to leave the asram of Viswamitra, he wanted to give Gurudhakshina to his teacher. Though Viswamitra said that it was not necessary to give such a Dakshina, Kalava persisted. Viswamitra lost his temper and told Kalava that he may give him 800 horses all having the colour of moon with one ear alone black in colour. Kalava was pained as he did not know how he could fulfill the wish of his teacher. Garuda happened to be there. Garuda promised to help Kalava. While Garuda and Kalava were discussing, there was a lady by name Sandili doing severe penance observing mounavratha. However when Garuda and Kalava came there she served them with food. But after taking the food Garuda spoke disparagingly about Sandili. That night the great lady cursed that Garuda would completely lose his feathers by the morning. The next morning Garuda found that he had shed all his feathers. He realised His mistake. He fell at the feet of Sandili and sought forgiveness. Pacified Sandili told Garuda to propitiate Siva to regain his wings and valour. The place where Garuda prayed to Siva came to be known as Suparnes vara Garuda and Kalava then reached the place of the rich king Yayati. Yayati found it difficult to find 800 horses. But Yayati gave his daughter to Kalava saying that he may give her to any king and get the money to buy the 800 horses. Thus it was Garuda who showed the way to Kalava to raise the money to give guru dakshina for his teacher.

There is yet another incident which illustrates how Garuda became conceited and God had to teach him a lesson. It is said that Gunakesi was a beautiful daughter of the charioteer of Indra. It was decided that Gunakesi would be married to Sumuka, a naga. But the father of Gunakesi realised that Garuda had eaten Sumuka's father earlier and had also given notice to Sumuka that within a month's time, he too would be eaten. The bride's side therefore approached Indra for a solution to their problem, Mahavishnu was also present there. Indra promised all assistance. The marriage of Sumuka with Gunakesi took place. This enraged Garuda so much that he went to Indra's assembly and insulted both Indra and Vishnu. Garuda said that the might of Vishnu was only because Garuda was carrying him. Vishnu therefore decided to teach a lesson to Garuda. He extended His right hand and asked Garuda to hold the hand. Garuda placed Vishnu's hand on his head and found he was being passed down to Pathala. Garuda then realised his mistake. Thus it was that Mahavishnu taught a lesson to Garuda and rid him of his conceit.

When the milky ocean was being churned the devas and asuras decided to use the Mandara mountain as the shaft and Vasuki as the rope to rotate the shaft. As directed by Mahavishnu Garuda alone was able to bring the Mandara mountain to the milky ocean though it was very heavy. Again when others were not able to bring Vasuki from Nagaloka, Garuda was asked to bring the Naga chief. Garuda went to Pathala. Vasuki asked Garuda to carry him over to the milky ocean if his presence was so necessary as to churn the ocean. Garuda thought that it was going to be very easy. He caught the middle part of Vasuki in his beak and rose in the air. But Garuda found that however high he were flying still a great portion of Vasuki remained on the ground. He tried to fold Vasuki into two and carry it but again he failed. Garuda returned without Vasuki. It is said that later Vasuki was brought to the milky ocean by the outstretched hands of Siva.

Another small incident that is related in the life history of Garuda deals with the Pandavas. When the Pandavas were in

exile in the forest at that time, Garuda picked up from the sea a naga for his food. But the vibration caused by the fluttering of the wings of Garuda caused the flowers in the garden of Kubera to fly. These were kalhara flowers. They fell at the feet of Panchali. The flowers were so fragrant that Panchali wore them in her hair and is said to have commented that if she were to have the fragrant flowers she indeed needed vayu to bring them. Bhima was stung to the quick. He rushed to mount Gandamadana to collect kalhara flowers and proved that in no way was he less than the mighty wind.

There is another story as to how Garuda saved Uparisaravasu, the king. Once upon a time, the devas and the brahmins had a discussion. The devas said that goat's flesh could be used while performing yagnas. The brahmins said that it was not necessary and that grains were good enough for the purpose of performing the yagna. Uparisaravasu was asked to arbitrate. He was indeed between the devil and the deep sea. He felt that if he voted in favour of the views of the devas, the brahmins would curse him and that if he voted in favour of the views of the brahmins the devas would curse him. However, Uparisaravasu spoke in favour of the devas. Immediately, the brahmins cursed that Uparisaravasu should fall from the sky into the pits of the earth. But the devas countered it by saying that though Uparisaravasu was sent to earth, he would not feel hungry and that in due course, he would be blessed by Mahavishnu and come back to Devaloka. Uparisaravasu prayed to Mahavishnu who sent Garuda. Garuda is said to have carried Uparisaravasu to sky on his wings and thus reinstalled him in Devaloka.

The story of Gajendra moksham is so well known that it bears no repetition. Gajendra, the elephant was caught by a crocodile. However hard the elephant tried, it could not get its feet released. Finally it shouted out for help to Devendra. Mahavishnu heard this sincere cry of His earnest devotee and wanted to rush to the rescue of the elephant. It is said that the eagerness of Mahavishnu to rush to the aid of His devotee was matched and exceeded, if any, by the anxiety of Garuda to fly His master Vishnu to the spot. It was Garuda who flew like lightning to the spot and enabled Vishnu to rescue Gajendra.

The speed with which he was going, it is said was so great that enroute the vahanas of Siva viz. Rishabam got frightened and stood petrified. Iravatham vahana of Indra also stood stupified. Brahma's vahana viz. Hamsa was also frightened. Such was the speed of Garuda.

Another story connected with Garuda relates to Krishna-vatara. It is said that one day Perumal was in yoga nidra in Thirupparkadal. Prabhada's son Virochana stole the crown that was resting on the head of Perumal. He carried it to Pathala and hid it deep down in Pathala. Later when the rishis came they saw that the crown was missing. They were very agitated. Perumal decided to teach a lesson to Virochana and also prove the valour of Garuda. He pretended as if He was not aware as to who stole the crown. He asked Garuda to search for the crown and bring it back. Peria Thiruvadi searched all over. He reached Pathala. He fought with Virochana, rescued the kireeta and was flying to Thirupparkadal. Enroute he passed over Brindavan. He saw Krishna seated and playing with His friends. Garuda came down and wanted to see whether this vaira mudi which he was carrying would fit the head of Krishna. He put the crown on the head of Krishna and it fitted perfectly.

It is believed that it is the same vaira mudi which even today adorns the head of Chella pillai, the Perumal of Yadhavagiri i.e. Thirunarayanapuram at Melkote near Mysore. This vairamudi is taken out only once a year at the time of Brahmotsavam during Garuda seva. This is known as Vaira mudi sevai. Thus connection between the Krishna in His vibhava avataram and Chella pillai in His archa avataram as well as Perumal in His paratvam is established through this vaira mudi seva in Melkote.

The might of Garuda is established also through another incident which took place during the Ramavatara. Once Rama and the asura Malyavan had a fierce fight. Garuda was on the side of Rama. He flapped his two wings in the sky. That single act made the air become gale, it is said to have resembled the wild wind that precedes samvartha clouds. The samvartha clouds are the pralaya kala clouds. It is said that when Garuda flapped his wings, all the demons flew in different directions

like wisps of cotton that is wafted and blown hither and thither by a strong wind. This is how Mahabharatham Udyogaparvam describes the Malyavan fight.

Earlier it has been mentioned in passing that Garuda it was who was able to release Rama and Lakshmana who were tied down by nagastra. Let us now go into some details of this incident. When Rama and Lakshmana were tied up by the naga astram let lose by Indrajith, they fainted on the battle field. At that time, Garuda suddenly appeared there and touched the body of Rama and Lakshmana and released them from the naga bondage. The moment Garuda came there, the nagastra lost its effectiveness says Valmiki. He even says that the moment the hands of Suparna touched the body of Rama and Lakshmana their body developed a certain glorious effulgence. They recovered their valour. Garuda is said to have blessed Rama and assured Him that he would succeed in rescuing Sita and he would celebrate His pattabhiseka shortly. At that time Garuda is said to have addressed Rama as "Sakhae" i.e. my friend.

Garuda purana relates another interesting anecdote. It says that once while the serpent king Vasuki was taking away the bile (pitta) of the demon Bala, Garuda attacked the former and in the process the bile fell down. Some portion of it was swallowed by Garuda but was immediately cast off through the nostrils. The cast off portion became the gem known as Maragadha (Greenish in colour).

I would like to quote here two songs composed by the great composer Thyagaraja on Garuda. The song is as follows :

Song one :

Thyagaraja's song about Garuda :

Ragam : Husseni.

Thalam : Adi.

Pallavi

Vinatha Sutha Ra... Ra... Na...

Vinatha Vinuthi Konuma :

Anupallavi :

*Kana Naga Pasambu!
Kandinha Ra.. Ra..*

Charanam :

1. *Amaresuni galechi nee vamruthamu thechchi
Vimala Keerthi vahinchi velasillina veera !!*
2. *Hari ki vahana mow mayyaya vega Ra.. Ra.. Nee..
Sari yai bhakthuni brova samayamidhi Ra.. Ra..*
3. *Thyagaraaja nathuni dasudow theera
Nagasana ninnu vina gathi yevvaru Ra?*

Meaning : Oh Vinathusuta come and accept my praise come and cut asunder the heavy serpent fetters which bind me. Oh hero! who defeated Indra and brought amrith, come quickly, oh you who are the vehicle of Vishnu. This is the time for you to protect me who is equal to you in devotion to the Lord. Oh brave one, who feeds on Serpents, the servant of the Lord adored by Thyagaraja, who else but you is my refuge.

Song Two :

Thyagaraja's song

Ragam : Sankarabharanam

Thala : Roopakam.

Pallavi :

*Vishnu Vahanudu idhigo
Vadalaе chootharae.*

Anupallavi :

*Krishna Charana Bhakthulalo
Keerthi Kalgu Bhagyasali.*

Charanam :

1. *Rangapathini Pongusoohruthranga
munandhu thalachi
Bangaru Sari Rangu Kalapa
Rangaraju Thananu chu ... nu..*
2. *Varunalayu Moralids vini
Karuna Poorithudai
Haribhaktula Paritapamu
Hari indhu Nanuchu Vatekaka*

3. *Rajillu Virajathipu*
Dee Jaga Muna Kaei yahi
Raja raja Bhoja Thyaga
Rajanuthuni Tha Pogudu chu!!

Meaning :

Oh look. The vahana of Vishnu is going. Amongst all the devotees worshipping the feet of Krishna, he is the most famous and lucky bird (*Pakshiraja*) who has installed Lord Ranganatha in the arena of his heart and is lost with happiness; you are the effulgent Garuda who heard the appeal of Samudra Raja and full of kindness ate the serpents so as to rid a Hari bhaktha of his troubles; you have come down to this earth and are singing the praise of the Perumal to whom Thyagaraja is offering his salutations. Oh ye come one and all and see that Garuda.

In brief Garuda is indeed unique. That is why in the Gita, Krishna says that amongst the birds He is Garuda, even as among the animals He is simham and amongst the snakes, He is Ananthan. Thus Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda has close sambandha and association with Perumal. Peialwar in one of his pasurams addressed God as :

Paravai Yer Param porulae'
Transalated it means 'O Lord seated on Garuda'

Andal in one place says that when Charama sloka was uttered by Krishna it was heard by Vishnuchitta i.e. Perialwar (*Nachiyar Thirumozhi pasuram 616*). It is said that Andal said like this : Only because when the charama sloka was uttered by Krishna on the battle field when seated on the chariot, the chariot is said to be Garuda amsam because it was the vahana of Perumal and Perialwar is believed to be tghe Garuda amsam.

It is in the fitness of things that I conclude by quoting two prayers on Garuda.

Garuda Dyanam:

Amritha Kalasa Hastham
Kanthi Sampoorana gathram

Sakala Vibudha Vandyam
 Veda Sastrai Kachintyam
 Kanaka Ruchira Pakshaiha
 Dhooya Mananda Kosam
 Sakala Visha Vinasam
 Chinthayeth Pakshirajam.

Garuda Stotram :

Garudaya Namasthubyam
 Namasthae Pakshinampathae
 Napogamadhi Rajaya Suparnaya Namoh Namaha
 Vinatha Nanda Roopaya
 Kasyapasya Suthayacha
 Aheenam Vairinae Thubhyam
 Vishnu Bhadraya Thae Namaha
 Raktha Roopaya Thae Pakshin
 Swetha Mastaka Poojitha
 Amrutha Haranae Hrushta Thasmai
 Devaya Thae Namaha.

Om Namoh Narayana

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- [illegible]

SRI VAIKUNTAM

This is one of the Nava Tirupathi divya desas of Pandya Nadu. It is on the Tirunelveli-Tiruchendur Railway line. It lies on the northern banks of Porunai river. It is about 3 miles away from Alwar Thirunagari, the birth place of Nammalwar. As the town is criss crossed with the river and the channels and there are also a number of tanks in and around this area, the holy place is full of luscious paddy fields. It gives one an impression as if it lies in Tanjore District which is the grannery of Tamil Nadu and not in the drought prone Tirunelveli District.

The moolavar here is known as Vaikuntanatha. The utsavar is known as Kallapiran. Perumal appeared to Somukhan, Indra and Brahma. The moolavar is seen in a standing posture and is facing east. He holds a mace in His hand. Adisesha is seen with His hood spread out like an umbrella over the head of the moolavar. The garbagriha of the moolavar is placed in quite some depth in the temple, but yet one inexplicable feature is that every year on one day during Uttarayanam, Dakshinayanam in the month of Chithirai (April-May) and Ippasi (Oct- Nov.) the rays of the Sun fall directly on the idol of the moolavar. The moolavar idol is believed to be made out of Saligramam. Everyday abisheka is done for the moolavar with milk. The utsavamurthi is seen along with Bhoomidevi. He is known as Choranathar or Kallapiran. He is also seen holding a mace in His hand. Thayar here is known as Vaikuntavalli as also Choranayaki. These two vigrahas are also made out of Saligramam. The Vimanam is known as Chandra Vimanam. The theerthams are known as Brighu theertham, Kalasa theertham and Tambaraparani river. The sthala purana of this place was related by Sutha muni to other munis like Parasara, Gowthama, Bharadwaja, Vasishta etc. in Naimisaranya forest.

There are three interesting stories relating to the sthala purana of this divya desa. The first one will explain how the place got the name of Sri Vaikuntam. Once upon a time there was a pralayam in Brahmaloaka. Lord Brahma was lost in deep sleep. At that time, an asura by name Somukhan stole the vedas from Lord Brahma. When Brahma woke up, he realised

the magnitude of the loss and felt perturbed. He converted a stick in His Hand into a brahmachari and ordered him to go to the banks of Tambaraparani river and select a suitable site for His tapas, as Brahma felt that the banks of Tambaraparani was holier than the banks of Ganga river. The brahmachari while searching for a suitable place got diverted and when he reached a place known as Jayanthipuri, he fell in love with a beautiful damsel and settled down there. Coming to know of this, Brahma took the kamandalam which He was holding in His right hand, converted it into a lady and asked her to go and locate a place which was fit for him to do tapas. She finally located a place which was near the present Sri Vaikuntam. Brahma came down to earth and agreed with the selection made by the damsel. He had his bath in Kalasa theertham and then did penance praying to Perumal. In course of time Perumal was pleased with his penance and appeared before Him. Brahma then related to Perumal as to how the demon had cheated Him and had stolen the vedas. He requested Perumal to help Him in recovering the lost vedas. Perumal killed Somukhan, the asura, retrieved the vedas and gave it back to Lord Brahma. As Perumal came all the way from Vaikuntam and as the place was full of luscious green fields, flowing river and tanks filled with water, Brahma felt it was almost like Bhooloka Vaikuntam and that Vaikuntanatha had come from Vaikunta to bless Him. He therefore named the place as Sri Vaikuntam. He requested God to continue to stay in the same place and bless the other devotees.

Once upon a time Indra who heard the greatness of this place from Narada muni visited Sri Vaikuntam. He had his bath in Kalasa theertham which henceforth came to be known as Indra theertham. He also offered worship to Perumal and was blessed by Him.

Yet another story connected with this place explains how the Perumal came to be known as Kallapiran or Choranatha. Long ago in Sri Vaikuntam there was a thief by name Kaladhooshakan. He had a gang of thieves under his control. They used to work as a group and loot the property of the people residing there. Kaladhooshakan had, however, one noble qual-

ity. He was a great devotee of Vaikuntanatha. Everyday before he started out on his job of stealing, he would visit the temple, offer prayers to Vaikuntanatha and seek His protection. He also promised Perumal that if that night he had a successful harvest, he would give Perumal half of the loot retaining only the balance of 50% for himself and his gang. Like this, he had a long successful innings. But one day Kala dhooshakan and his team wanted to rob the King's palace. As usual, Kaladhooshakan offered prayers to the Perumal and led his gang into the palace. But this time his luck ran out. As the thieves were busy looting, the guards in the palace woke up, they chased the thieves and though Kaladhooshakan escaped, a few in his gang were caught. On interrogation they confessed that their leader was Kaladhooshakan and they agreed to identify him for the palace guards. Meantime Kaladhooshakan who escaped, went to the temple, fell at the feet of Perumal and sought protection. The ocean of mercy, the dark hued Perumal appeared before Kaladhooshakan as an old brahmin. He asked him not to be frightened and promised all help. Having said that, the brahmin disappeared. Perumal assumed the form of Kaladhooshakan and went towards the palace. Meantime, the palace guards were coming in that way along with some of the captured thieves. On sighting Perumal disguised as Kaladhooshakan the thieves mistook Him to be their leader and identified Him to the palace guards. The palace guards caught hold of Perumal who had assumed the form of Kaladhooshakan and took Him before the king. The king then addressed Kaladhooshakan and asked him who he was and why he had resorted to thieving. Baghavan then replied 'O king! my name is Kallarpiran. I live in Sri Vaikuntam. for the sake of my living, I planned to steel a part of your wealth'. On being asked whether he did not consider thieving as a sin, he replied that the king was not aware of his own faults. The thief continued and said that wealth always had four shareholders. They are dharmam (gifting) Agni (fire), Thirudan (thief) and Raja (king). The most important among these four shareholders is dharma. What was not utilised towards dharma only has been stolen by me. Instead I would advise you to do more dharma and distribute your wealth to the needy'. Hearing this lecture on dharma, the king realised that the man standing before him cannot be a thief. He realised

it must be God. He thanked the person for the sound advise that he gave and asked him to reveal his true form. Perumal then appeared before him. As god appeared as Kallapiran and as the leader of the thieves henceforth He came to be known as Choranathan i.e. leader of the thieves. This story, Nava Tirupathi mahatyam says, was repeated by Narada to Indra.

Another interesting story explains how and why abishekam is performed everyday to the moolavar with milk. It is said that the idol installed by Brahma, and the temple built by him, in course of time, got covered by sand and a minor forest grew up in that area. During the Pandyan rule they used to send their cattle to graze in that forest. After sometime, the milk men found that one cow was not yielding milk. They thought that the cow herd was stealing the milk. Therefore one day they reported the matter to the king and decided to incognito follow the cow herd and watch him for some time. They acted accordingly. That day, they saw a very unusual incident. When it was time for the cows to return, a particular cow went to a hillock and emptied the milk from its udder into an opening on the top of an ant hill in that place. Thus unusual event was watched for a few successive days. The matter was then reported to the king. The king and his retinue decided to explore the mystery of the ant hill. They carefully dug deep into that ant hill and behold the idol of Vaikuntanatha along with the original sannidhi built by Lord Brahma emerged. The Pandyan king was very happy. He had the sannidhi renovated and re-installed Vaikuntanadha. From that day till date Vaikuntanadha is given his daily thirumanjanam in milk without fail. Hence it is that the Perumal here is also known as Paal Pandyan i.e. Milk Pandyan because Pandya Raja restored the sannidhi and continued the daily milk abishekam.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS

This is yet another of the Pandya Nadu divya desam which abounds with epigraphical evidences in the various stones built into the temple.

In an inscription on a stone built into the eastern wall inside the Mani mandapam in the Kallapiran temple records the grant of land for lighting a perpetual lamp and for feeding ten brahmanas. The mahasabha exempted this land from all taxes. ¹

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the Mani mandapa related to the Pandyan period and it records exemption from tax of land in Nallur granted for the construction of Sundarapandya Thiru gopuram. ²

Another inscription on the same eastern wall of the Mani mandapan records the grant of land in the western hamlet of Sri Vaikuntam from the king's personal land as Thirunandavanapuram. That was also exempted from taxes. ³

Another inscription in the same wall records the grant of land in the western hamlet of Srivaikuntam from the king's personal property for being used for various offerings to the Goddess Vaikuntavalli Thayar. ⁴

Another inscription on the same wall records yet another grant from the king from his personal property in Sri Padmanabhamangalam for conducting a festival in the month of Vaikasi to the God Kallapiran. ⁵

Two more inscriptions on the same eastern wall record the grant of land to conduct a service named after the king Sundarapandyan Sanadhi for Kallapiran and another named after the other king Virapandya Sandhi. ⁶

In the same wall there is an inscription which records a similar gift of land in the northern hamlet of Aavoor to conduct

¹ Ins.No.372 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

² Ins.No.373 of ARIE 1959-60 Appehdix B.

³ Ins.No.374 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

⁴ Ins.No.375 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

⁵ Ins.No.376 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

⁶ Ins.No.377 & 378 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

a festival on the day of Mula in Masi. It is the birthday of the king.⁷

Another inscription on the same wall records the grant of land by the king in Sivalla Valanadu for the construction of Kulasekharan Thirumandapam.⁸

Another inscription on the same eastern wall of the Mani mandapan records the grant of tax free land as Thirupanipuram for the construction of Sundarapandya Thirumadil.⁹

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the maha mandapa to the right of the entrance of the Kallapiram temple records a royal gift of 200 ma of land made tax free for service and food offerings on the occasion of the Kulasekharan sundi instituted in his own name for God Kallapiran.¹⁰

Another inscription on the eastern wall of Maha mandapam records a gift by the king of land made free of taxes in the northern hamlet of Srivaikuntam for the celebration of Vaikasi festival said to have been abandoned for some time.¹¹

An inscription on the west end of the northern wall of the inner gopura in this temple records the order of the God allotting 3 nali of prasadam to Nachiyar, daughter of Vaikuntam, an adiyar in the temple.¹²

On the eastern end of the same wall there is another inscription which registers the grant of 250 pon for repairs in the temple of Kallapiran for the merit of Ramaraja.¹³

⁷ Ins.No.379 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

⁸ Ins.No.380 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

⁹ Ins.No.381 of ARIE 1959-60 Appendix B.

¹⁰ Ins.No.341 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

¹¹ Ins.No.342 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

¹² Ins.No.343 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

¹³ Ins.No.344 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

On the western end of the south wall of the same gopura, there is an inscription which records an endowment of 110 pon for the supply of a garland and food offering of one Nali daily to Kallapiran Perumal. ¹⁴

On the same wall there is an inscription which records a conferment of God at Srivaikuntam of the offices madapattiya-kanakku, muddirai, etc. to Perumal Tirumalai nambi Vaikuntanatha/dasan, a senapati. ¹⁵

There is another inscription on the Mani mandapa eastern wall in this temple which records the gift of two achchus for burning two sandya lamps. ¹⁶

Another inscription on the same wall relating to the period of Jatavarman Kulasekhara Pandyan records a grant of land to Jeer Singa perumal Tadar for tending a garden by the tenants of the sabha of Rajendra chaturvedimangalam in Tiruvaludi-valanadu. ¹⁷

HYMNOLOGY:-

Nammalwar has sung 2 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of those pasurams along with the song sung by Divyakavin Pillai Perumal Iyengar and its meaning is given below:-

Thiruvaimozhi 9-2-8:-

எங்கள் கண்முகப்பே உலகர்களெல்லாம் இணையடி
தொழுதெழு திறைஞ்சி,
தங்கள் அன்பாரத் தமது சொல் வலத்தால்
தலைத் தலைச் சிறந்து பூசிப்ப
திங்கள் சேர்மாடத் திருப் புணங் குடியாய்
திருவைகுந்தத் துள்ளாய் தேவா!

¹⁴ Ins.No.345 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

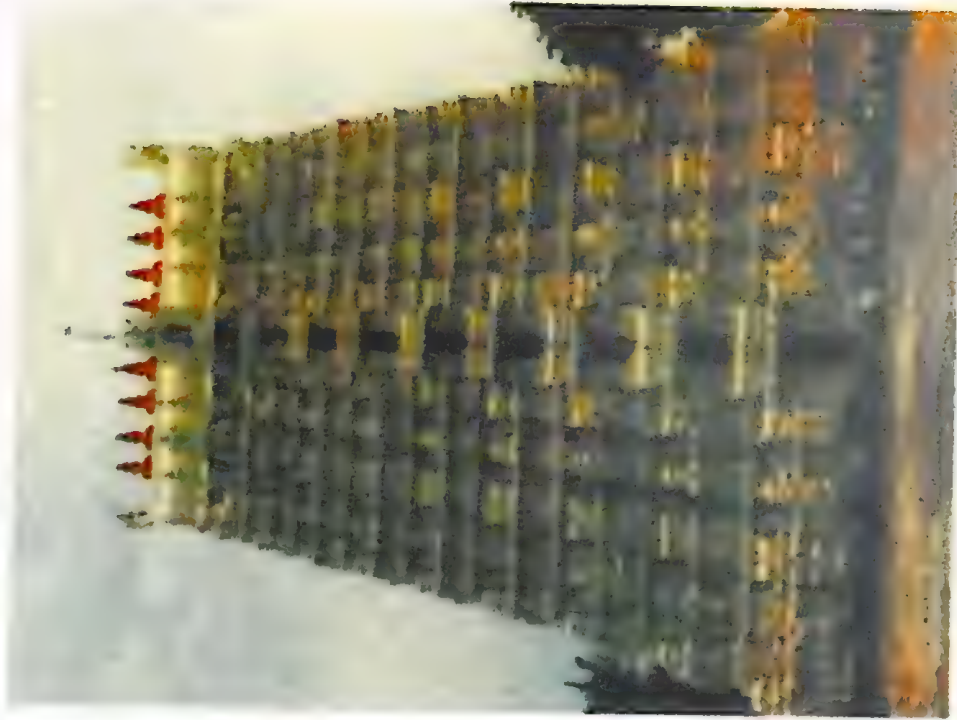
¹⁵ Ins.No.346 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B.

¹⁶ Ins.No.439 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix B.

¹⁷ Ins.No.440 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix B.



The Utsavamoorthi at Sri Vaikuntam



The Temple Tower at Sri Vaikuntam

Kallapiran Swami Garuda Sevai at Sri Valkuntam



Thiru Varagunamangai Perumal Garudasevai



இங்கண் மாரூலத்து இதனும் ஒரு நாள்
இருந்திடாய் வீற்றிடங் கொண்டே

Meaning:

Oh Lord of Srivaikunta!

Oh the Lord of Thiruppulinkudi where the house tops touch the moon!

Please stay at Thiruppulingudi so that before our very eyes

We can see all the people of this world bow and worship at your divine feet and with enchanting words express their utmost affection to you;

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupati Andhaadi:-

தார் உடுத்துத் தூசு தலைக்கு அணியும் பேதை இவள்
நேர் உடுத்த சிந்தைநிலை அறியேன் - போர் உடுத்த
பாவை குந்தம் பண்டு ஓசித்தான் பச்சைத் துழாய்
நாடும்;

சீவைகுந்தம் பாடும், தெளிந்து.

Meaning:

I am not able to understand and comprehend the change in the mental attitude of this poor girl who earlier did not even known how to wear a saree, or where to wear the garland, but now adorns herself with the tulasi garland worn earlier by the Perumal of Srivaikuntam and then sings sweetly uttering the name of this Srivaikuntam town.

Note:- This is the tale of woe of the nurse at the changed behaviour of her young charge.

VARAGUNAMANGAI

This is also one of the Nava Tirupathis in Pandya Nadu. It lies about one mile to the east on the Sri Vaikuntam Tuticorin road. It is on the northern banks of Porunai river. It is more popularly known as Nathham.

The Perumal here is known as Vijayasanar. He is seen in a seated posture facing east. The Thayar is known as Varagunavalli. The vimanam is Vijayakodi Vimanam. The theertham is Deva Pushkarini and Agni Theertham. God is said to have appeared to Agni baghavan.

The greatness and the glory of this place was related by Sanaka to Visuvasakan. The greatness of this place is related through a story. It is said that once upon a time in Varagunamangai, Romasa muni was doing penance. His disciple was Satyavan. One day Satyavan had his bath in the Akhasa theertham and was returning. At that time he passed by a tank. A fisherman was casting his net and catching fish. He already had a good catch on the bund. Yet obviously, out of greed, he again cast his net. At that time a vicious cobra came from behind and bit him. The fisherman died on the spot. The ghandarvas from Devaloka came in a vimanam and carried away the fisherman to swarga loka. His body which is left behind became prey to the birds in that area. The devotee Satyavan seeing all this felt intrigued. He went to his teacher Romasa muni and expressed his doubts as to how this fisherman who was avaricious had been blessed with Devaloka. Romasa then replied that all the sins committed by the fisherman got wiped out by the one over-riding virtue viz., the accident of his birth in this holy place. The muni said that in his earlier birth this fisherman committed a number of sins, he was a son of the King of Vidharba. He had all the bad qualities. His associates were also equally bad. When he died, the muni said he went to Naraka i.e. hell. But because of one punyam that he had done when he was re-born he was born in Varagunamangai, the holy spot. The muni said that it was this fact that he lost his life in the holy place which entitled him to go to Devaloka.

Romansa muni related yet another story to his disciple. He said that in days of yore on the banks of Reva nadhi there was an agraharam by name Punyakosam. In that agraharam there was a brahmin by name Vedavith. He was greatly devoted to his parents and teacher. He was also a devout person who offered daily prayers to Perumal. One day Perumal appeared before him in the form of a brahmin and advised him to go to Varagunamangai which lay in the midst of Sahya hills and to do tapas. The brahmin accordingly went to Varagunamangai and did severe penance. Perumal appeared before him and gave him moksha. In response to the prayers of that brahmin, Perumal continued to stay in Varagunamangai under the name of Vijaya sanan.

These are the two small stories relating to Varagunamangai divya desam.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung one pasuram in praise of the Lord here. That pasuram along with the song sung by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning is given below:

Nammalwar Thiruvaimozhi (9-2-4)

புனிங்குடிக் கிடந்து வரகுணமங்கை இருந்து
 வைகுந்தத்துள் நின்று!
 தெனுந்த என் சிந்தை அகல் கழியாதே
 என்னையான் வாய் எனக்கருளி!
 நனிரந்த சீருக் முன்றுடன் வியப்ப
 நாங்கள் கூத்தாடி நின்றூர்ப்ப!
 பனிங்கு நீர் முகலின் பவளம் போல்
 கனிவாய் சிவப்ப நீ காண வாராயே!

Meaning:

Oh God!

Seen in a lying down posture of Thiruppulingudi and in a sitting posture at Varagunamangai and in a standing posture at Srivaikuntam, you have lightened my worries and lessened my troubles. You have made me your slave with your grace. Oh

God! Please bless us with your darshan so that we can dance with joy and see your mouth which looks like a coral creeper spread on a dark rain bearing cloud (i.e. Perumal's body)

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Aandaadhi:

காலமும் நோயும் கருதாத அன்னைமீர்
வேலன் வெறியை விலக்குமினகள் - மால் ஆம்
வரகுண மங்கையன் தான் வன் துழாய் மேல் ஆ -
தரகுண மங்கை தனக்கு.

Meaning:

Oh ye women

How is it you are not able to understand the nature of her sickness especially when you know her age. She is not suffering from any excessive love towards Lord Muruga. The Muruga exorcision (Veri attam) that you have organised will not cure this sickness. Your daughter has got unbounded love towards the tulasi garland adorning the feet of the Perumal at Varagunamangai. Her disease and your medicine do not match.

Note: This is the advice given by the companion to the nursing attendant (sevili thai). Nammalwar expresses the same thought when he said

"Madhalar thuyazh mudi mayapiran
Kazhal vazhithinal adhuva
Ival utra noikkum aru marundu agumae".

"மாதலர் துழாய் முடி மேயப் பிராள்
கழல் வழித்தினால் அதுவே
இவள் உற்ற நோய்க்கும் அரு மருந்து ஆகுமே"

In these lines the Alwar says that the best medicine to cure the (love) sickness of the damsel is to sing pallandu (strotram) to the lotus feet of that Perumal whose body is adorned with the



Thiru Varagunamangai Moolavar



A View of the Temple Tower of Thiru Varagunamangai

honey sweet smelling tulasi garland. The advice given by the foster mother is sevili thai to match the sickness and the cure reminds one of the saying in Tirukkural (Tamil) which reads as follows:

*"Noi Nadi, Noi mudal Nadi, adhu thanickkum
Vai Nadi, Vaipa seyal".*

நோய் நாடி நோய் முதல் நாடி அது தனாக்கும்
வாய் நாடி வாய்ப்பு செயல்"

This means that first one must diagnose the sickness, analyse its cause, and then think as to which medicine will cure that illness and only then prescribe the correct medicine.

THIRUPPULINGUDI

This is the third in the Nava Tirupathis of Pandya Nadu. It is on the northern banks of Tamabaraparani river and about one mile to the north of Varagunamangai. The Perumal here is known as Kaisina Vendhan, as also Bhoomi Palar. Thayar is known as Malarmakal Nachiyar and Pulingudivalli. The theertham is Varuna theertham. Vimanam is Vedaśara vi-manam. He appeared to the King of Dharmapura, Visuvasakan. The moolavar is seen facing east in a bhujaṅga sayana pose. The Alwar referred to these first three Tirupathis and said that the Perumal who is seen in a standing posture at Sri Vaikuntam, is seen in a sitting posture at Natham and is in a lying down posture at Thiruppulingudi.

The sthala purana of this place was told by Sanaka rishi to the King of Dharmapura Visuvasakan by name. It is said that once upon a time, Perumal and Thayar seated on Garuda were flying in the sky. They were attracted by the beautiful scenic scene on the banks of Tamabaraparani. They both descended to have a close look. They were captivated by the beauty of the flow of water surrounded by the luscious green fields, birds twittering, calm and cool and peaceful atmosphere. Perumal and Mahalakshmi stayed on there enjoying the place. Bhoomidevi, it is alleged, got annoyed and jealous as she was not with Perumal. Out of disgust and frustration she is said to have left Vaikuntam in a huff to Pathala loka. When she, who is the sustenance of earth, water and all living things, left, the world got enveloped in darkness. The living creatures were gasping for breath. The devas who saw this rushed to Perumal and pleaded with him. Baghavan understood all that had happened. He and Lakshmi devi thayar went to Pathala loka, searched for Bhoomidevi and brought Her also to the place of scenic splendour on the banks of Tamabaraparani river. God and the two thayars stayed in this place known as Thiruppulingudi for some time. As God brought Bhoomidevi to this place, it came to be known as Bhoomipalana kshetram. Perumal came to be known as Bhoomi palar. Bhoomi palar is a Sanskrit word. The same translated in Tamil stands for Kai Sina Vendhan.

Yet another story connected with this place refers to an incident in the life of Indra. Once upon a time, Indra along with his wife Indirani went to Himalayas and were enjoying life in a tank filled with lotuses. One day, a rishi along with his wife both having assumed the forms of deers had come to the same place and were enjoying themselves. Seeing the deer distracting his solitude, Indra let loose his Vajrayudham. The weapon hit the male deer. the male deer was the rishi. He fell down dead on the spot. Seeing the damage caused by his wanton act, Indra became frightened. He realised that he had committed Brahmahatty dosha and he had to atone for the sin. He started behaving like a man who had lost his senses. The devas who saw this went to their Guru Bruhaspathy and sought his intervention. The deva guru advised Indra to go to Thiruppulingudi and worship Perumal there. Indra accordingly went to Thiruppulingudi on the banks of Tamabaraparani river, had his bath in the tank there, worshipped Bhoomipalar and got released from his curse. The tank henceforth came to be known as Indra theertham.

Indra then decided to perform a yaga on the banks of the holy river. A rakshasa came there and was trying to spoil the yaga. Indra who had started performing the yaga could not fight with the demon. He worshipped Bhoomipalar and requested Perumal to help him. Perumal took His mace and felled the demon. The soul of the demon was seated on a vimanam which had the glow of thousand Suns and was carried away to Devaloka. The demon then explained his story and said that in his previous birth he was a brahmin by name Yagna Sharma. As a householder, he had conducted a Yagna, but had failed to give sufficient dakshina to the Vasishta Putras who helped in conducting the yaga. Hence the Vasishta Putras cursed that he become a demon. He fell at their feet and asked for sapa vimochana redemption from the curse. They advised him to go to Thiruppulingudi on the banks of Tambaraparani river. They said that Indra would come there to perform a yaga on the banks of the river. They advised the demon to disturb Indra and prevent the completion of yaga. Then Perumal will surely appear and kill the demon. The Vasishta putras said that only then the demon will be relieved of his curse and attain moksha. Thus, its that the demon was waiting for Indra to start his

yaga. He thanked Perumal for blessing him and flew away to salvation.

One of the reasons why Perumal is known as Kai Sina Vendhan has been mentioned earlier. Alwar in his pasuram however has another reason and refers to the Perumal as Kai Sina Vendhu. This refers to the above incident when Perumal rushed to the assistance of Indra who was performing a yaga and was being disturbed by rakshasas, to see that no harm is caused to Indira and his yaga. God is said to have got angry (sinam) and destroyed the demons (vendhu). Hence it is that Alwar refers to this God as Kai Sina Vendu. Both the meanings appear appropriate and apt.

It is said Ramanuja the great seer on his way to Kurugoor to meet Nammalwar stayed at Thiruppulingudi. He is said to have asked the daughter of a priest the direction for going to Kurugoor and distance to Kurugoor from that place. The daughter of the priest is said to have repeated the pasuram of Nammalwar to Ramanuja and then said that Thirukurugoor was within ear shot of the place where Ramanaja was standing. Hearing the pasuram of Nammalwar repeated by this slip of a girl, Ramanuja felt stunned. He fell at her feet and thought that she was Nammalwar herself.

One more interesting feature in this temple deals with the structure of the idol of Perumal. As stated earlier, the moolavar is seen in a majestic Bhujanga sayana pose. From His nabhi a lotus creeper emerges. This is sculpted in a very realistic manner in stone. This stone lotus creeper reaches the wall and at the end sports a lotus flower, on which Lord Brahma is seen seated. Usually while depicting Brahma emerging from the nabhi of Lord Narayana, a simple lotus stalk is all that is depicted. Here a certain poetry in stone has been added to make the end product look eye catching.

Yet another unique feature is that while having seva near the Garbagriha both the feet of Perumal i.e. Tiruvadi darsanam cannot be had in a satisfactory manner. Standing near the garbagriha one can see only one foot of the moolavar. However,

in order to enable the devotee to have darshan of both the feet, we are asked to do pardakshina outside the garbagriha and then there is a window in the outer prakara, peeping through it one can have a clear uninterrupted view of both the feet i.e. Thiruvadiseva.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung 12 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of those pasuram along with the song sung by Divyakavil Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:

Thiruvaimozhi (9-2-6)

காய் சினப் பறவையூர்ந்து பொன்மலையின்
மீமிசைக் கார்முகில் போல்
மாசின மாலி மாலிமரஎனன்று அங்கவர்
படக் கனன்றுமுன் நின்ற
காய்சின வேந்தே! கதிர்முடி யானே!
கலிவயல் திருப் புணங் குடியாய்!
காய் சின வாழி சங்குவாள் வில்தன்
டேந்திஎம் மிடர் கூடி வானே!

Meaning:

Seated on the angry Garuda you, Oh Kaisinavendha Perumal
set off to destroy the asuras Mali and Sumali;
You were then the picture of a dark cloud spread on the top
of golden hued Meru mountain
Oh God who wears the dazzling crown
Oh God who reside in prosperous Thiruppulingudi;
Oh God whose hands are adorned with the Panchayudhams
like Shanku and Chakra and resolves all my troubles;
Please give me darshan and bless me.

Note: Mali, Sumali and Malyavan etc. are all the asuras who ruled Lanka before Ravana.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengars's 108 Tirupathi Aandaadhi:

தெனியும் பசும் பொற் சிறைக் காற்றுவீச
வினியும் துயர்போய் வீடுமே - எனியேற்கு

அருளப் புனிங்குடி வாழ் அச்சுதனைக் கொண்டு,
கருளப்புன் இங்கு வந்தக்கால்.

Meaning:-

If only Garuda comes here carrying Thiruppulingudi Perumal on his shoulder, then the breeze from the flutter of his wings will blow on me also and will rid me of all earthly sorrows that flow out of separation from Him. I would then be enlightened.

(These are the words of the lady to her companion).

THIRU KULANDHAI (PERUNGULAM)

This is one among the Nava Tirupathis of Pandya Nadu. It lies about 7 miles to the north-east of Sri Vaikuntam. It also lies on the northern banks of Tambaraparani river. The Perumal in this place is known as Vengutavanan. The utsavar is known as Mayakoothan. Thayar is known as Alarmelvalli, Kulandhavi. The vimanam is Anandha nilaya vimanam. Theerthan is Perungulam. God appeared to Bruhaspathi. The moolavar is seen in a standing posture.

At Thataka vanam near Thulai villi mangalam, a brahmin by name Vedasaran lived. His wife was Kumuda valli. They had no children. In response to their sincere prayers, after a long time, God blessed them with a girl. They named her Kamalavathi. Even when she was five years old, Kamalavathi was expressing her desire to marry none other than Perumal Himself. The parents and the other people tried to dissuade her. But she was very adamant. She undertook a severe penance. God appeared and asked her as to why at such a young age, she had taken up a severe penance. Kamalavathi replied that she wished to marry only Lord Narayana and that her people were trying to prevent her from achieving her wish. Perumal then revealed His true form to her. He is said to have taken her and placed her along with Kousthuba mani on His chest. As this town was the place where the young girl did tapas the place came to be known a Balika vanam i.e. young girls' forest.

Vedasaran and his wife Kumudavalli had other children. They continued to be living in Thirukulandhai. One day Kumudavalli went to have her bath at the tank. At that time, a demon by name Asamsaran kidnapped her. It is said that this demon had vowed to marry 1000 women. He was living in one of the caves of the Himalayas. He had already married 998 women. Kumudavalli was the 999th woman. He hid her in the cave and went out in search of the 1000th lady. Meantime Vadasaran came to know about the abduction of his wife. He went and offered prayers to Perumal and requested him to restore his wife to him. Baghavan got on to Garuda, went to Himalayas, found Kumudavalli hidden in a cave and brought her back to

Vadasaran. Meantime when the demon, returned, he missed Kumudavalli. He came to know about Perumal having rescued her. He therefore came to Balika vanam and fought with the Perumal. God caught the asura by the legs and thrashed his head on the floor. Even as he danced on the head of Kalinga, the venomous serpent, he danced on the head of this asura. People who watched this unholy gory sight brought water from Ganga and did Thirumanjanam to God. As Perumal stood on the head of the Maya asura and did a dance (koothu) He came to be known as Mayakoothan. He was also known as Chora Natyar as He danced on the head of the thief i.e. a chor,

As Perumal flew seated on the back of Garuda, the idol of Garuda here is seen with its wings flapping as it were. It is also said that after the asura was killed, he became a Gandharava and flew away to heaven as he was released from his curse due to the Perumal dancing on him.

This place is also well known as a holy place for Sani (Saturn) Baghavan.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung one pasuram in praise of the Lord here. That pasuram along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar on this Perumal and their meaning are given below:-

Nammalwar - Thiruvalmozhi (9-1-5)

சதுர மென்று தம்மைத் தாமே சம்மதித்து
இன்மொழியார்
மதுர போகம் துற்றவரே வைகிமற்
ரென்றுவர்
அதிர்கொள் செய்கை யசுரர் மங்க வடமது
ரைப்பிறந்தாற்கு
எதிர்கொ ளாளாய் உய்ய லல்லால் இல்லைசண்
மர்இளபமே

Meaning:-

Those who talk big, thinking they are great

Those who are lost in enjoying the ephemeral
sensual pleasures in the company of sweet
tongued damsels
Will certainly at one point of time reap the evil
consequences and have to face terrible
unthinkable shame;
Instead, seek refuge at the feet of Lord.
There can be no other everlasting and greater pleasure.
He had taken the avathar as Mayakoothan at
Vadamadurai and He is the one who vanquished
all the asuras whose evil actions sent shock
waves of terrible fear into us.

(Alwar conveys the thought that the ephemeral pleasures will surely sooner than later result in terrible shame. Instead seek refuge he says, at the feet of God. You will never ever have occasion to hang down your head in shame.)

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Andanadhi:

தளக்கு உடலம் வேறா தளமை உனரார்;
மனக்கவலை தீர்த்து உய்யமர்ட்டார் - நினைக்கில்
திருக்குளந்தையார் உரைத்த சேர்க் கைத்பார் மாந்-
தருக்கு உளம் தையாமல் இருந்தால்.

Meaning:

The God who is seen at Thirukulandai is Krishna (Parthasarathy). During the Mahabharatha war on the very first day in the battle field itself. He expounded the Gita to Arjuna. Everyone of us should read the Gita and grasp the fundamental truth expounded therein viz., that soul (atman) is different from body (sarceram). The man who fails to realise this simple truth will never be able to free himself from the mortal coils of mental worries. He will never be able to attain moksha.

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THIRU THULAI VILLI MANGALAM (IRATTAI TIRUPATHI)

This is the fourth and the fifth Diva desams in the group of Nava Tirupathis in Pandya Nadu. It lies about three miles to the east of Thiruppulingudi. As in this place there are two temples for Perumal, it is known as Irrattai Tirupathi i.e. Double Tirupathi. This place is also on the banks of Tambaraparani river. It is in the midst of a minor forest. About one mile from Tirukkulandhai one reaches a place known as Mangala Kurichi. If we proceed along the channel for another two miles and then cross the channel, we reach this divya desam. The alternative route is to come two miles from Alwar Thirunagari and cross the Tambaraparani river even then one can reach the divya desam. The two temples are at either side of the bank of Tambaraparani channel. If there is no water in the river, one can walk across the channel and visit both the divya desams. Both these places together are counted as one divya desam.

The moolavar known as Devapiran is seen in a standing posture facing east in one temple. The moolavar in the other temple is known as Aravinda Lochanan. He is seen in a sitting posture also facing east. The thayar is known as Karun thadankanni Nachiyar. Theertham is known as Varuna theertham. Tambaraparani river. Vimanam is Kumuda vimanam. God appeared to Indira, Vayu and Varuna.

South east of Thiruppulingudi there are vast rice fields, flower groves. It is known as Kedara Nilayam. Once there was a rishi by name suprapar. He came to Kedara Nilayam and was taken in by the scenic beauty of this place and decided to perform a yaga there. In order to put up the Yagasalai he decided to clear the land and make it even. As he was preparing the ground, he came across a balance (Tharasu) and a bow (vil). He was surprised. He wondered to whom it belonged. He lifted it with his right hand. The moment he touched the bow, and the balance, the balance became a beautiful lady and bow became a beautiful youth. They both said that because of a sin committed by them they were cursed to assume the form of a bow and a balance and that the touch of the holy rishi had

redeemed them of their curse. Suprapa asked them for their story. The man said 'Oh Great sage! In my previous birth, I was a deva by name Vidyadharan. This lady was my wife. I came to this place. We fell in love with this place and were enjoying each other's company. One day Kubera came here. We both were too much in love to notice what was happening outside. Kubera got angry. He cursed that both of us should lose our form and that one would become a bow and the other would become a balance". As soon as he cursed them, the man and his wife fell at the feet of Kubera and asked for Sapa Vimochanam. Kubera advised them to go to Kedaram. He said that the curse would become operative the moment they reached Kedaram. He continued that they would be lying hidden underneath the earth, and that after a long time, a rishi will come and would try to prepare the ground for performing a yaga. He will then touch you. Then you will re-assume your real form. The man continued that since then he and his wife were patiently waiting for the arrival of the sage and that only to-day their patience was rewarded and they had the pleasure of their curse being redeemed. The muni heard the story. He completed the yaga in that place. He prayed to Lord Narayana. Perumal appeared before him. The sage requested that henceforth Perumal will be known as Devapiran in that place and that as thulai and villi had regained their form here this place should be blessed as to be equally auspicious for others i.e. a mangala kshetram and that henceforth the place should be known as Thulaivilli Mangalam. God conceded this request of Suprapa rishi.

Suprapa rishi continued to offer prayers to Perumal. He would go to the Padmadhara thadakam, a tank in the northern direction to the temple. He would pluck the lotus flowers from the tank, weave them into a garland and put it round the neck of Perumal. Perumal was also happy with this daily offering by Suprapar. He wanted to know from where he was collecting the beautiful flowers. One day Devapiran followed the rishi. He was also taken in by the beauty of the tank. He found the place was cool, full of flowers and the cool breeze from Malaya Parvatham was blowing softly. He decided to stay on in the bank of that tank. He said that henceforth he will be known as Aravinda Lochanan and that whoever worships him with a lotus

flower will earn his blessings. Suprapar henceforth worshipped Perumal in both the places. Thus it is that the Irattai Tirupathi became two sannadhis but one divya desam.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to the theertham i.e. holy tank of this place. Aswini devas were two devas. They are usually regarded as the doctors amongst the devas. They met Brahma and requested that they also should be given a part of the havis from the yaga performed by Suprapar. Brahma said that the rishis felt that they are rendering medical assistance and are not following the path of dharma exclusively and so the aswini devas are not entitled to a part of the havis from their yagam. However if they wished to have a part of the havis, Brahma advised them to go to Thulaivillimangalam, and worship Perumal in His two forms as Deva piran and Aravinda Lochanan and that in due course God would concede their wish. Accordingly Aswini devas came to the tank at Thulaivilli mangalam, had their bath and continued to offer worship to Devapiran and Aravinda Lochanan. In due course God was pleased with their penance. He conceded their request that henceforth they will also be given a part of the havis from the yagas conducted by the rishis. Perumal also added that henceforth the tank will be known as Aswini theertham.

The holiness of this theertham is evidenced by yet another story. Long ago on the banks of the Ganga river, there was a town by name Akalangam. There lived a brahmin by name Satya Seelan. He had three children. They were named Vannisaran, Swarnakethu and Vibheedhakan. In course of time they got married. They continued to live as a happy united family. After some time, Satyaseelan passed away. The brother discovered that Vibheedhakan was afflicted by a deadly disease viz., leprosy. The two brothers willingly took him to all doctors as well as the divya kshetras but to no avail. Once Narada came there. The brothers repeated their tale of woe to Narada and asked him whether there was any solution to their problem. Narada with his gnana drushti was able to realise that Vibheedhakan was cursed with this affliction as in his previous birth also when he was a brahmin, he had stolen the cow belonging to his guru. The guru had cursed that in his next birth he would be

afflicted by a disease which would slowly eat away his fingers and toes and that he would look ugly. Having thus explained, the cause for Vibheedhakan's disease, Narada advised them to go to Thulaivilli mangalam on the northern banks of Tambaraparani river and to worship Devapiran and Aravinda Lochanan. He also advised Vibheedhakan to have his daily bath in Aswini theertham and then offer worship to the Perumal. The brothers acted accordingly. In course of time, their sincere prayers were answered and Vibheedhakan got cured. Later the brothers also attained moksha.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung 11 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One such pasuram along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meanings are given below:

Nammalwar Thiruvaimozhi (6-5-8):

திருந்து வேதமும் வேள்வி யும்திரு மாம களிரும்
தாம் மலிந்
திருந்து வாழ்பொரு நல்ல டகரை வண் தொ
லைவில்லி மங்கலம்
கருந்த டங்கண்ணி கைதொ முதஅந் நாஸ்தொ
டங்கிஇந் நாஸ்தொறும்
இருந்தி ருந்துஅர விந்தலோசன! என்றெள்
நைந் திரங்குமே

Meaning:

(This is a pasuram where the mother describes her daughter's behaviour while thinking of this Perumal).

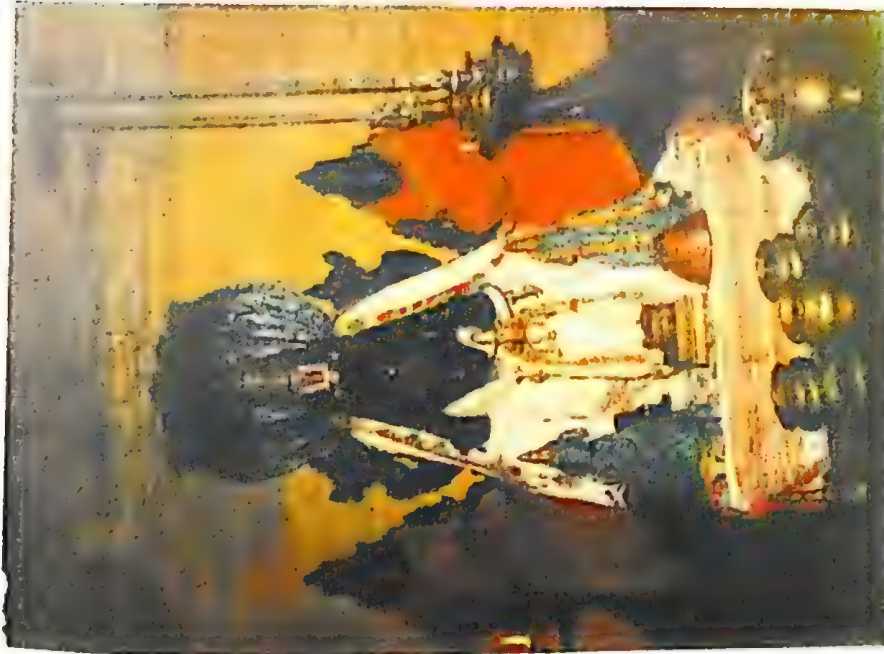
This, daughter of mine with beautiful dark eyes lined with kajal, lifts her hand in salutation to Tholaivillimangalam - the prosperous divya desam which is on the northern bank of Tambaraparani river, where learned discourses on vedas are held and the yagas are performed strictly as per the vedic code. After repeatedly addressing the lord as "Aravinda Lochana" with loving devotion, her voice falters and she is so overcome with emotion that she is lost to this world (i.e. to say thinking of that Perumal she has gone into a trance).

**Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Andhaadi:**

வாயும் மனைவியர், பூமங்கையர்கள் - எம்பிராற்கு
ஆயுதங்கள், ஆழிமுதல் ஐம்படைகள்; தூய்
தொலைவில்லிமங்கலம் ஊர்: தோள், புருவம், மேனி;
மலை, வில், இமம் கலந்த வான்.

Meaning:

Our Lord,
Who has Sreedevi residing in lotus flower and
Bhoodevi as His consorts-
Who has discus and other Panchayudhams as His
weapons-
Who is in Tholaivillimangalam
His shoulders are impressive like a majestic
mountain and his eyebrows are curved like
a bow.



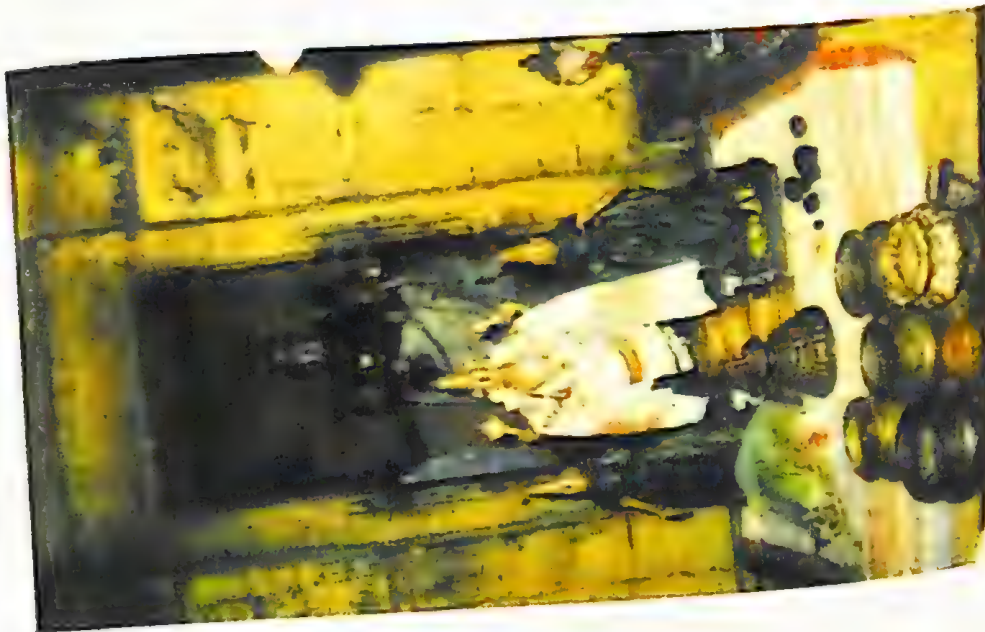
Moolavar Aravinda Lochanan



Utsavamoothis of Thiru Thulai Villi Mangalam



Utsavamoorthi Devapiran



Moolavar Devapiran

THEN THIRUPPERAI

Then Thirupperai is situated on the trunk road connecting Tirunelveli and Tiruchendur. It is a small village lying on the southern banks of the river Tambaraparani. It is one of the Nava Tirupathis of Pandya Nadu. The Perumal here is known as Makara Nedum Kuzhai Kadar (Mughil Vannan). Thayar is known as Kuzhai Kada valli. The vimanam is known as Badra vimanam. Perumal is seen in a sitting posture facing east. Theertham is Sukra pushkarani and Shanka theertham. God is said to have appeared to Sukra, Eesanya Rudrar and Brahma.

It is said that the name Then Thirupperai is derived from "Per + aiel" which in Tamil means long and majestic castles and forts. Nammalwar has immortalised this place by singing the following words "Veda Oliyum, Pillai kuzha vilayattoliyum Arattha".

"வேத ஒளியும் பிள்ளை குழ விளையாட் டொலியும்
ஆராட்ட"

Literally translated this means that this place was resounding with the sound of repeating the vedas, the music associated with celebration of festivals and the sound of children playing.

Once upon a time, Mahalakshmi Thayar felt that God preferred Bhodevi to Her. She complained to Durvasa rishi about this. She requested Durvasa to Help Her by blessing Her with the colour of Bhoomidevi and at the same time making Bhoomidevi become like her. Durvasa agreed. He went to Then Thirupperai, where Bhoomi devi and Perumal were residing. It is said that Bhoomidevi did not even pay any respect to Durvasa, but continued to sit on the lap of Perumal. The rishi therefore got angry. He cursed that her form may become like that of Lakshmi. Bhoomi devi immediately regretted her action. She fell at his feet and asked for release from the curse. Durvasa advised her to go to Haripada Kshetram on the southern banks of Tambaraparani river. He asked her to have her bath in that river and then offer prayers to the Perumal there and assured her that in course of time she would regain her original form. Bhoomidevi accordingly went to Haripadha kshetram and was repeating the

Ashtakashara mantram. As Bhoomidevi acquired the body of Lakshmi thayar, she came to be known as Sri Perai. She had her bath in the theertham near Haripada Kshetram and continued to do tapas. One day she saw two kundalams looking like fishes (the ornament worn on the ears). She felt that those kundalams will be fit to adorn only the beautiful ears of Perumal. The moment she thought of Perumal, Perumal appeared before Her and took the two makara kundalams from her. He wore it. The devas from above showered flower petals. Devadhundhubi was heard. An asareeri voice said that as Perumal had worn the makara kundalams He would henceforth be known as Makara Nedum Kuzhai Kadar. The theertham where the makara kundalams were found came to be known as Makara theertham.

Once the demons started a battle with Varuna. Varuna had offended his teacher Guru baghavan. He had joined with the other munis and performed a yaga without offering prayers to his guru. As a consequence, Guru cursed Varuna and Varuna lost his weapon the pasam. The wife of Varuna then rushed to Guru baghavan and sought his protection and forgiveness. Meantime Varuna also fell at the feet of Guru. Guru then advised him to go to the banks of Tambaraparani river and offer prayers to Perumal at Thirupperai. He promised that Perumal would fulfill his wish. Varuna accordingly went to Thirupperai. He had his bath in Makara theertham. Once in the month of Panguni on the Full Moon day he had thirumanjanam performed to Perumal. Perumal then took a little of the thirumanjana water in His hand and allowed it to fall through His fingers like a dhara. Immediately, the water got converted into a pasam (a rope). Thus, the weapon was restored to Varuna. He returned to his kingdom, fought the asuras, defeated them and regained his kingdom. Every year in the month of Panguni, on the Full Moon day, it is believed that Varuna comes and performs thirumanjanam to the Perumal here.

Yet another story connected with this place explains its greatness. It is said that once in Vidharba desa there was no rain for about twelve years. The kingdom was affected by severe drought. Seeing the people suffer, the king approached his Guru and asked the reason for such harsh conditions. He

was advised to go to Thirupperai and worship the Perumal there. Accordingly the king along with his retinue went to Thirupperai and had his bath in the Makara theertham, worshipped Kuzhai kadar. In course of time, heavy rains occurred in Vidharba desa and the lost prosperity was regained.

It is believed that the waters of Ganga and other punya nadhis are mixed in the Makara theertham. In addition waters from Deva loka rivers are also said to be merged in this place. Hence the combined merits of all these holy rivers contributed to the holiness of the waters in the Makara theertham. As the holy waters of all this world as well as the other world are said to have joined in this place, theertham is also known as Thirumanjana thurai and also Koottu Punal Thurai. Literally translated it means this is the theertham where the waters of all holy rivers are mixed.

It is said that during Ramavataram while returning after defeating Ravana, Vijayaraghava i.e. victorious Rama, came to the banks of the river cauvery. He gifted 18 towns lying on the southern and the northern banks of the river cauvery to Thalavakara Swami veda families. These people were regarded as the descendants of Jaimini muni. They followed the Sama veda. They are very few in number. They regarded the Kenopanishad as the Thalavaraka Upanishad. They regarded it as their personal property. It is said during the days of Sundara Pandyan he selected 108 families and brought them to Then Thirupperai, promising to give them land, houses and asked them to settle down there and render service to God. It is said at that time when the function for distribution of land and houses was to be celebrated, one among the 108 was missing. The king felt very sad. He prayed to Perumal. Perumal appeared in the dreams of the king and told him that he was the 108th person in that group of Thalavakarars. It is this which even today makes the people living in this place believe firmly that God is related to them and that He is one amongst them. So much so in the Thadi aradhanai festival when mass feeding is done, the first leaf is reserved for Kuzhai Kadar i.e. Perumal himself. Food is served ceremoniously on that leaf. Even today when anyone belonging to the family of the original 108 Thalavakararas dies,

the fire for the funeral pyre is taken from Then Thirupperai Kuzhai Kadar's temple only. It is their firm belief that Thirupperai Kuzhai Kadars fire will ensure their entry into Parana padam and reach the feet of the Lord.

One other unusual feature in this divya desam is that Garuda sannidhi which is usually right opposite to Perumal sannidhi in all vaishnavite temples is conspicuous by its absence here. It is seen only on the banks of the channel. A story hangs around this unique incident. It is said that this Perumal was very fond of watching the children playing games as well as enact the deeds of Perumal and sing the songs praising God. God was very fond of watching the happiness on the faces of the children while they enjoyed themselves like this. It is said that God wanted to watch the song and dance of the children in the road in front of the sannidhi without any obstruction, He asked Garuda not to stand in the way of His watching the children. This explains the strange location of Garuda sannidhi on the banks of the channel and not right in front of the Moolavar sannidhi.

EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCES:

There is one stone inscription relating to the Rajaraja Chola relating to 26th year of his reign (B.C.1010-1011) which refers to the sale of land to a particular brahmin.

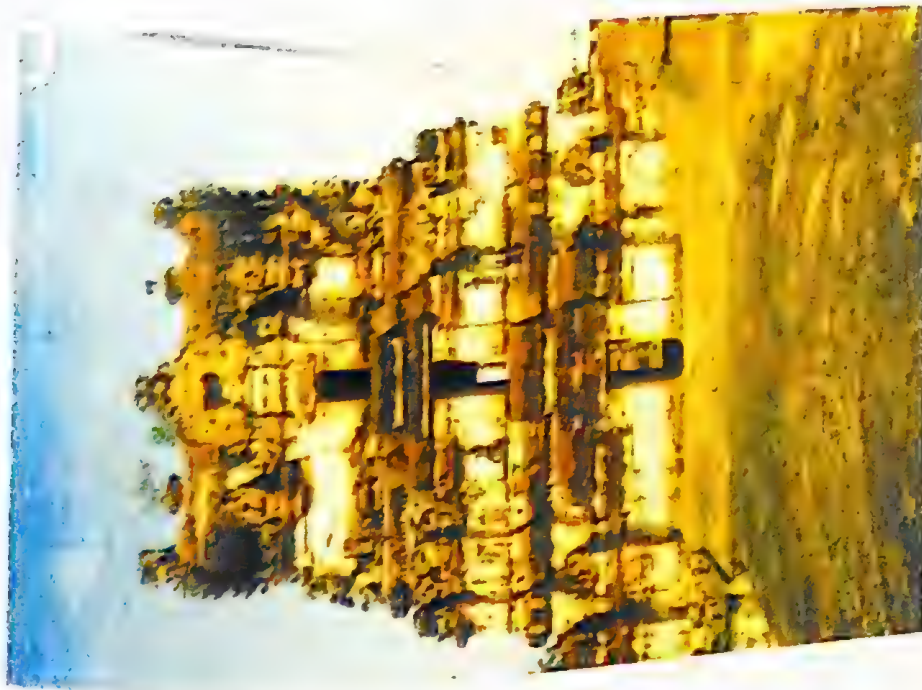
There is an inscription on the base of the pillar in Sayana Mandapa in this temple, which says that the sayana mandapa was caused to be constructed by Krishnan son of Sri Rama Pillai at Then Thirupperai. ¹

An inscription near the entrance to the Maha mandapa (southern door post) of this temple records the construction of Nadai maligai by Vinjarangananar. ²

Some fragments built into the wall of the first prakara in this temple relating to the period of Rajendra Chola records

¹ Ins.No.444 ARJE 1961-62 Appendix B

² Ins.No.711 ARJE 1962-63 Appendix B



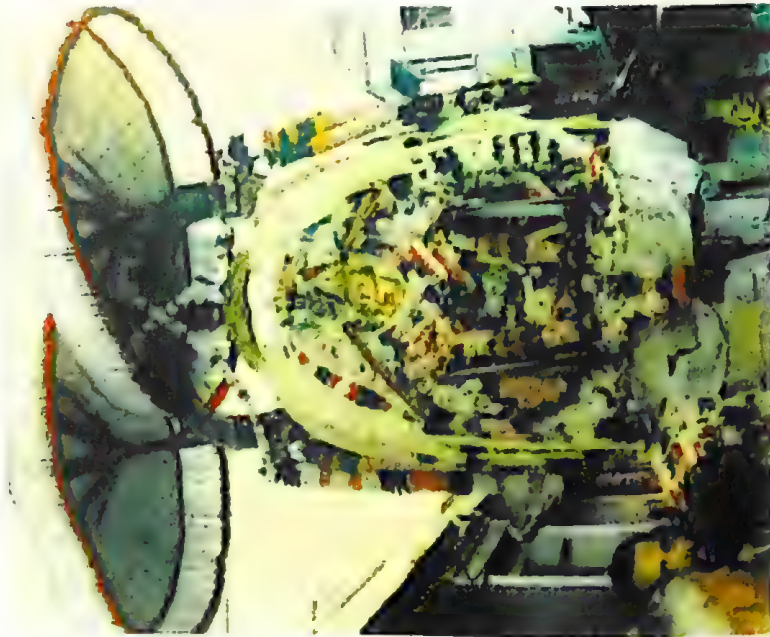
Then Thirupperai Temple Tower



Then Thirupperai Moolvar



Then Thirupperai Utsavamoorthi



Then Thirupperai Perumal Garudasevai

grant for food offerings to the deity, Makara Nedum Kuzhai Kathar. ³

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung 11 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One such pasuram along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Thiruvaimozhi (7-3-5):

(முனிந்த சக- முதைத்து மாயப் பேய்முலை உண்டு
கனிந்த விளவுக்குக் கன்மெறிந்த கண்ண பிரானுக்கு
முனிந்து இனி என் செய்தீர் அன்னைமீர்காள்! முன்னி
கனிந்த பொழில் திருப்பேரையிற்கே காலம் பெற
என்னைக் காட்டுமினே.

Meaning:

I have become the slave of Lord Krishna
Who out of justified anger destroyed the asura Sakatan
who sucked the life out of Poothana accepting the
poisoned milk offered by her -
who crawled through two hefty trees and felled them down
(i.e. when Yasodha tied him to a mortar (ural), he
dragged it and crawled between the two trees and
felled them)
who threw Vatsasuran appearing in the form of a calf and
Kapithasuran in the form of a wood apple tree and
destroyed both the asuras in one shot.
Oh ye motherly women! what can you do to me now. Please
take me to Then Thirupperai so that I may stand before Lord
Krishna who is seen in Thenthirupperai in a sitting posture.
That will be the best and most priceless help that you can ever
hope to extend to me.

³ Ins.No.712 and 713 ARIE 1962-63 Appendix B

Note: This alwar is always very fond of Krishna Avataram.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengars's

108 Tirupathi Andaadhi:

அரைச ஆகி வையம் முழுது ஆண்டாலும், இன்பக்
கரை சார மாட்டார்கள் கண்மர் - முரைச ஆரும்
தென் திருப்பேரைப் பதியான் சீர் கேட்டு, நாவில்
அவன்-
தன் திருப் பேரைப் பதியாதார்.

Meaning:

Even if one becomes the emperor and rules the entire world,
You can see that he cannot attain eternal bliss (moksha) If he
does not hear about the grace of the Lord at Thirupperai and
utters His beautiful names.

THIRUKKOLUR

This divya desam lies about two miles to the east of Alwar Thirunagari. This is also situated on the southern banks of Porunai river. This is the birth place of Madurakavi Alwar. The Perumal here is known as Nikshepavithan as also Vaithamaanidhi Perumal. He is seen in a bhujaanga sayana pose facing east. Thayar is known as Kolurvalli Nachiyar as also Kumudavalli Nachiyar. The vimanam is known as Srikara vimanam. The theertham is Kubera theertham. God appeared to Kubera and Madurakavi Alwar.

To briefly recapitulate the sthala purana of this place-long time ago Kubera, the Lord of wealth lived in Alagapuri. He was a Siva baktha and a close friend of Lord Siva. He had the right to enter into Kailasa at all points of time. On one such occasion when he visited Kailasa Lord Siva and Parvathi were together enjoying each other's company. Parvathi looked strikingly beautiful. Looking at her Kubera was not able to identify the beautiful Gowri. He wondered as to who she was. Parvathi got angry and cursed that Kubera would loose his beautiful form and become ugly and that all the Nava nidhis (his wealth) would desert him. He would loose one eye. On hearing this Kubera was very sad. He prayed to Lord Siva, explained to him all that happened and asked to be forgiven. Lord Siva advised him to approach Parvathi herself. Meantime because of Parvathi's curse he lost his Navanidhis. The Navanidhis came to bhooloka, searching for Perumal. They reached the banks of the Porunai river (Tambaraparani river). They reached a place known as Thirukkolur. They had their bath in the holy tank, sought Perumal's protection. Damodara promptly granted them protection. Henceforth the theertham where the Navanidhis had their purificatory bath and offered prayers to Perumal came to be known as Nidhi theertham. The forest where they stayed offering prayers to Perumal came to be known as Nidhi vanam and as Perumal agreed to keep the Navanidhis with Him and protect them, he came to be known as Vaitha Maanidhi i.e. Protector of Nava nidhis. He is seen resting His head on marakkal (a unit used to measure commodities). It is believed that God is keeping the Navanidhis safe with Him.

Meantime Kubera prayed to Parvathi. She advised him to go to Thirukkolor and offer prayers to Perumal who was guarding His navanidhis. Parvathi then related a connected story. She said that once upon a time, a brahmin by name Dharmadhattan had eight sons and two daughters. He lived in abject poverty. He prayed to Bharadwaja muni who was staying on the banks of river Narmada and asked for relief from his poverty. Bharadwaja muni with his gnana drushti realised the sin committed by Dharmadhattan in his previous birth. He had a lot of wealth. He would never share it with any of his relatives leave alone others. Once when the king of his area asked him as to how much of wealth he had, he denied having any wealth and thus uttered a blatant lie. As he never shared his property with others, in course of time, thieves looted his wealth. He died heart broken. Bharadwaja muni said that was the story of his previous birth. He therefore said that in this birth also he was suffering from want and pangs of hunger. He advised him to go to a place known as Adharmaposunam on the banks of Tambaraparani river and offer prayers to the perumal. Bharadwaja said that the Perumal there was guarding the Navanidhis of Kubera and hence He would bless the brahmin with wealth. Dharmadatta accordingly went to offer sincere prayers to Vaitha Maanidhi. Perumal appeared before him and blessed him. Parvathi devi related this story and advised Kubera also to go to Adharmapisunam and pray to the Perumal there so as to recover his lost wealth. She however said that Kubera will never get back his one eye and lost beauty. Kubera acted accordingly. He prayed to Perumal. Perumal said that he could not return the entire wealth, but he would return him only a part. As He measured a part of wealth which he parted to Kubera, He is seen in a lying down posture with a marakkal i.e. measuring unit under His head.

It is said that once upon a time Dharma lost ground and Adharma got the upper hand. Feeling dejected, Dharma came to this nidhivanam and prayed to Perumal. The devas also got worried at adharma getting the upper hand. They started searching for Perumal. they reached Nidhi vanam, located dharma there. Meantime adharma also came to know about this. He also arrived at Nidhivanam and waged a battle with

dharma. But dharma emerged victorious. Hence it is that this place is known by another name also viz. Adharma Pisunam.

The place is also known as Thirukkolor. As stated earlier, due to the curse of Parvathi the Nava nidhis left Kubera and sought protection with Perumal at this place. As the nidhi i.e. Thiru came searching for protection to this place this place came to be known as Thirukkolor.

But another book detailing the temples in Tirunelveli District, their history etc. says that the Chola, Chera and Pandya kings decided to forget their enmity for some time and worship Lord Siva at this place. As these three kings joined and worshipped Siva here, the place is known as Kolor. It is said that as the three dynasties worshipped Siva here, Siva is known as Chola Chera Pandeesar.

It is said that once Ramanuja was on his way to Thirukkolor. People from Thirukkolor and other areas came to receive him even outside the limits of the town. A lady who came to receive him prostrated before him. Ramanuja asked her as to from where she was coming. She replied that she came from Thirukkolor. Ramanuja smiled and just casually quoted the lines from Nammalwar's Thiruvaimozhi pasuram 6-7-1 and said how is it when all women are waiting to go to Thirukkolor you have left Thirukkolor and come here. (This particular pasuram and its meaning is given later on this chapter in the part dealing with hymnology). Little did Ramanuja anticipate that this lady was a devoted and knowledgeable person. She answered his question by replying with a set of eighty rhetorical questions, which referred to various incidents in the lives of sages, saints and Gods. In each one of those questions she compared the depth of devotion displayed by the characters mentioned in that question and said that she in no way equalled them as to worship Perumal and hence had no right to expect Perumal to treat her in any special manner. These set of eighty questions are known as "Thirukkolor Pen Pillai Rahasyam". This rahasyam is found in "Panneerayirappadi Guru Paramparai". It is written by Thiruvaimozhi pillai, a sishya of Pillai Lokacharya. By sheer accident I came across a very old

rare copy of this book. I found that the questions and answers were very interesting, I thought it worthwhile to relate them here-though it be briefly.

1. அழைத்து வருகிறேனென்றேனோ அக்குரரைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Akroora offer to invite the Lord for the function?

This refers to an incident in Krishnavataram when Kamsa arranged for a "Vil Vizhavu" and asked Akroora to invite Balarama and Krishna for that festival Akroora knew the intentions of Kamsa, viz. to invigle Krishna and then destroy him. Yet Akroora agreed to go and personally extend the invitation so that he could avail of the opportunity to have the darshan of Krishna Paramatma.

The lady therefore asks did I have such a rare opportunity as to meet the Perumal?

2. அகமொழித்து விட்டேனோ விதுரரைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I conquer my ego like Vidhura?

This again refers to an incident in Krishnavatara. Krishna went to Hastinapuri to meet the Kauravas as a Pandava Dhootha. Bhishmacharya, Dhronacharya, Asvattama, Vidhura and others went to receive Krishna. All of them expected Krishna to stay with them. Bhishma felt that he was a great soul and that Krishna would surely come to his house. Similarly Dhrona felt that he belonged to a higher caste and Krishna would certainly honour him with a visit. Vidhura on the other hand was very humble and was worried that Krishna may not come to his small abode. When Krishna walked through the streets, he passed by each of these houses. When he came near the house of Vidhura, Vidhura told him that the house belonged to Krishna and invited Him to enter His house! Krishna smiled and entered that house. Vidhura was thus the only person who realised that there is no such thing as mine or I. Everything belongs to God. The lady therefore says, have I the wisdom and humility

of a Vidhura to realise that nothing belongs to me (Sarvam Krishnarpanamasthu)?

3. தேகத்தை விட்டேனோ ரிஷி பத்தினியைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I give up my life like the rishi pathni?

This also refers to an incident in Krishnavataram. Once the cow herd boys who were grazing the cattle along with Krishna felt hungry and asked Krishna to arrange for meals. Krishna advised them to go to a place nearby where the brahmins were performing a Sattira Yaga known as Angareesam. The boys went there, but drew a blank as the Brahmins did not give them the food. When the cow herd boys returned disappointed, Krishna advised them to go again and meet the wives of those brahmins, mention His name and then ask for food. This time on hearing Krishna's name, the wives prepared a feast and brought it themselves to the place where Krishna was staying and served the cowherd boys as well as Krishna, the food which they had prepared lovingly. What is more, they were so happy with the company of the Lord, that they refused to return home. Krishna persuaded all of them to return. But one rishi pathni alone refused to leave the company of Krishna. She did dyana and gave up her life there itself.

Thirukkolor lady therefore asks Do I have that degree of attachment to Perumal as to give up my very life?

4. தசமுகனைச் செற்றேனோ பிடாடியைப் போலே!

She asks Did I rebuff Ravana like Thayar?

This refers to an incident in Ramavataram. When Sita Devi was held a hostage in Lanka, Ravana tried all his wiles to win her. But Sita Devi unmindful of the wrath of the demon, stood steadfast and with her prathivatya mahima (the power of her chastity) regarded only Lord Sri Rama as her saviour. Her steadfast belief in the Lord and conviction that He will rescue her, led to the destruction of the demon.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asked Do I have that sort of power and sakthi as was displayed by the Divine Mother?

5. பிணமெழுப்பி விட்டேனோ தொண்டமானைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I bring back to life the dead persons like Thondaman?

Once there was a brahmin by name Sharma. He wanted to go to Kasi. But he died before he could fulfill his wish. His son Krishna Sharma therefore decided to take his bones and merge them in the Ganges river at Kasi. When he started on his Kasi Yatra, he left his young wife and his three months old son with Thondaiman for safe custody. The king promised to look after them till he returned. On his return, Krishna Sharma met the king and asked for his wife and child. Unfortunately, meantime, Thondaiman had forgotten about his responsibility. He went into the palace to only discover that the wife and the child had died. The king informed Krishna Sharma that the wife and the child have gone to Tirupathi and would be returning within two days. The king rushed to Tirupathi, prayed to Lord Srinivasa to rescue him from this impasse, failing which to cause his instantaneous death. As Thondaiman was a great devotee of Lord Srinivasa, the Lord breathed life into the skeletons of wife and the son i.e the charges of the king. The king returned and was able to fulfill the word that he gave to Krishna Sharma.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asked Do I have that sort of apara bakthi i.e. limitless devotion like Thondaiman so as to revive a corpse?

6. பிணவிருந்திட் டேனோ கண்டாகர்ணனைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Ghantakarna offer the corpse to the Lord as a feast?

Ghantakarna was a Siva Baktha. He used to wear bells on his ears so that whenever Vishnu namasankirthana is done he would shake his head and the din of the bells would prevent his hearing the name of Vishnu ! He prayed to Lord Siva for moksha. But Siva appeared before him and asked him to pray to Lord Vishnu for Moksha. Ghantakarna approached Kubera. Kubera also advised accordingly and asked him to repeat the

Ashtakshara mantram and pray to Lord Vishnu. Ghantakarna proceeded to Dwaraka. He met Lord Krishna there. He is said to have offered a corpse which he had brought with him as his sincere offering while paying obeisance to Lord Krishna. Krishna accepted the same and conferred moksha on him.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Do I have that depth of devotion like Ghantakarna to offer a corpse and have it accepted by Perumal.

7. தாய்க்கோலஞ் செய்தேனோ அநஸூயையைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like anusuya take on the role of a mother and dress up Thayar?

Anusuya is the wife of Athri muni. During His Vanavasam, Rama along with Sita visited this asrama. Anusuya looked at beautiful Sita and a motherly feeling welled up in her. She hugged her, took her inside, dressed her up in a silk saree, decorated her with lots of flowers in the hair and beautified the Loka matha and enjoyed the divine sight.

Thirukkolor lady therefore asked Do I have that depth of motherly affection like Anusuya?

8. தந்தை எங்கே யென்றேனோ துருவனைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Dhruva ask where is my father?

The story of Dhruva is well known. One day when he could not get on the lap of his father where his step-brother was sitting, he approached his mother for solace. She advised him to pray to Jagatpitha for having his desire fulfilled. Dhruva then asked where is that Jagat pitha of mine? Mother then advised him to go the forest and do tapas, to attain that heavenly father. Dhruva repeated the Dwadasakshara mantra and in due course was blessed by Perumal and became a pole star in the sky shedding eternal light to all.

The Thirukkolor lady asked Do I have that gnanam and bakthi which the young child Dhruva had as to seek and attain the eternal father.

9. முன்றெழுத்து சொன்னேனோ சஷ்தரபந்துவைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Kshatrabandhu repeat the mantra with three syllables.

Once upon a time, there lived a cruel person by name Kshatrabandhu. The king banished him to the forests. Even there, he was causing terror and trouble to the residents in the forest. One day a rishi who was walking that way strayed in the path of Kshatrabandhu. To quench his thirst the rishi stepped into a pond near by. Unfortunately, he slipped and fell into the pond. Kshatrabandhu who was watching all this dropped his weapons jumped into the tank and rescued the rishi. He offered lotus stalks as food to the rishi and satisfied his hunger and thirst. He gently fanned the rishi and then repeated his story. The rishi then advised him to give up his evil ways. He initiated him into the three lettered mantra viz. the word Govinda and asked him to repeat that mantra incessantly as it will ensure his salvation. Kshatrabandhu followed the advise and attained moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asked did I like Kshetrabandu repeate the Govinda mantra?

10. முதலடியைப் பெற்றேனோ அகலிகையைப் போலே!

The lady asks, as in the case of Ahalya did the holy feet touch me?

This refers to an incident in Ramavataram. After helping Visvamisra and other rishis to complete their yaga, Rama was returning to Mithila. Enroute His feet touched a stone and behold the stone turned into a woman. The woman was Ahalya, wife of Gowthama rishi who had turned into a stone as a result of a curse inflicted on her by her husband.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks am I so fortunate as to be touched by the dust of the holy feet of Perumal?

11. பிஞ்சாய்ப் பழத்தேனோ ஆண்டாளைப் போலே!

The lady asks did I attain the fruit of enlightenment even while young?

Andal, the daughter of Perialwar is a famous Vaishnavite savant. Even from her young age, she had attained para bakthi, then para gnanam and finally parama bakthi and became one with God.

The lady from Thirukkolor therefore asks whether like Andal she had the fortune of attaining the height of devotion even at an young age.

12. எம்பெருமானென்றேனோ பட்டர்பிரானைப் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Perialwar address God as Emberuman?

This refers to the incident when Perialwar known as Bhattar piran sang Pallandu to Perumal and addressed Him as Emberuman. Once the Pandyan king held a contest to establish the supremacy of vaishnavism. Perialwar was able to convince with his arguments the fundamental truth in vaishnavism. The king then seated Alwar on a caparisoned elephant and took him round the four streets of Madurai in a victorious procession. It is believed that Perumal and thayar came on Garuda vahana to witness this sight. On sighting the divine couple, Perialwar out of his boundless affection to the Lord, was worried that someone may cast an evil eye on the beautiful vigraha of Perumal! He spontaneously burst forth and sang the Pallandu to Perumal (i.e. an invocatory song praying for long life to God!)

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether like Perialwar she had the depth of devotion to think even the Supreme Protector needed to be protected by her.

13. ஆராய்ந்து விட்டேனோ திருமழிசையார் போலே!

She asks, Did I like Thirumazhisai Alwar accept Vaishnavism after critically examining the alternate religions?

Thirumazhisai Alwar, one of the vaishnavite savants, is said to have examined in great detail the tenets of Bhuddism, Jainism,

Samanam, Saivism before he finally accepted Vaishnavism. As a Siva baktha, he was known as Siva Vakkiyar. He met Pey alwar and after a serious discussion between these two alwars, Pey alwar convinced Thirumazhisai Alwar that Narayana was the only Supreme Deity. Thus Thirumazhisai Alwar adopted vaishnavism after studying in depth the truth as enunciated by the many religions.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Did I like Thirumazhisai Alwar have the gnana to examine the merits and demerits of the different religions before accepting the one and the only true path?

14. அவள் சிரியனென் றேனோ ஆழ்வாரைப்போலே!

The lady asks Did I like the Alwar say that He is a small man?

The lady refers to a statement made by Nammalwar, in one of his pasurams. Nammalwar says that God had swallowed all the seven worlds and kept them safe in his stomach during the great deluge. Such a God who had swallowed the world itself, the Alwar said, has entered his heart. Nammalwar therefore say he is bigger and God is small. Alwar felt that in as much as he held captive in his heart, Sarveswaran, the Perumal become a Siriyavan (the smaller one) and the Alwar the Periyavan (the bigger one)! irrefutable logic!

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore says Did I have the bakthi and the gnanam like Nammalwar who claimed that God within him has to be smaller than him. The content has to be smaller than the container theory.

15. ஏதேனும் என்ரேனோ குலசேகரர் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Kulasekhara Alwar express a desire to be any object in Tirumala.

This refers to the desire expressed by Kulasekhara Alwar to be any object on Tirumala i.e. Tirupati so as to have proximity to Lord Srinivasa of Thiruvengadam. This alwar has in about ten

pasurams expressed specific desire to be a kurugu bird in Swamy pushkarini, or a fish in a tank at Tirupati, or a kainkaryadar doing service holding the golden bowl for the Perumal or a shenbaga tree in the Tirumala or a lifeless stone pillar on the vengadam hill or a forest stream in the hill or a pathway leading to the temple. Finally he said O God Let me by any object, so that neither need God Himself know, nor others need know, lest they should feel envious. But his only desire was to have deiva sambandam with Tirumalai hills.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Do I like Kulasekhara Alwar have such a depth of attachment towards the Perumal?

16. யான் ஸத்யமென்றேனோ கிருஷ்ணனைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Krishna say that I am the truth?

This refers to an incident in Mahabharatham. Asvattama, the senapathi of Kauravas let loose the Apanda asthiram on Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu. As a result, the child in her womb became a piece of burnt wood. when Uttara delivered that dead wood, Lord Krishna said that if a true brahmachari touched that piece of wood, it would regain its life. Astonishingly none came forward to satisfy that condition. Then Krishna, though He is the Lord of so many Gopis, came forward and claimed that He was a true brahmachari and blessed the dead wood to regain its lost life.

The lady of Thirukkolor refers to this incident and says Do I say that I am the ultimate truth? (Sath brahman)

17. அடையாளஞ் சொன்னேனோ கபந்தனைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Kabandan have an opportunity to suggest a solution to Perumal?

This relates to an incident in Ramayana while searching for Sita who had been abducted by Ravana. Enroute they met Kabandan, the demon. He had no legs, no head. Only he had a big stomach and very long hands. The mouth was also inside

the stomach. The eyes were on his chest. He would stretch out both his hands and whatever was collected within the ambit of the widespread arms would be pushed into his stomach. It was a horrible sight. Unfortunately, once when he spread out in his hands, Rama and Lakshmana also got into its ambit. Rama advised Lakshmana to cut one arm, while He would cut the other. When the arms were cut, the demon remembered what Indra had told him earlier. He requested Rama to burn his body and assured Rama that only then he would resume his earlier form. Rama obliged. The curse of Kabandan was redeemed. As a mark of gratitude, Kabandan informed Rama that his search for Sita would end soon. He advised him to go to the bank of Pamba, seek the help of Sugreeva, the monkey king in Rishiya mukha hill and with his help successfully locate Sita.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Do I like Kabandan have an opportunity to offer solace and extend the helping hand to a troubled Perumal?

18. அந்தரங்கஞ் சொள்ளேனோ திரிஜடையாப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Thrijatai, the demoness share a secret with Sita Devi?

This refers to an incident in Ramayana. Thrijatai is the daughter of Vibhishana. She was a kind hearted and wise lady. She befriended Sita when she was kept captive in the forest. Once Ravana with his maya made a demon look like Janaka Maharishi, tied him up in front of Sita and thus caused mental anguish to her. At that time, Thrijatai, unknown to Ravana, met Sita, comforted her and told her that this is maya and that the pseudo Janaka was actually a demon by name Manthan. On an other occasion when Sita was very worried, she instilled some confidence into Her and told Her a secret about Ravana's curse as per which if he touched any woman other than his wife, his head would split. That is why when Ravana abducted Sita, he physically carried the entire piece of earth on which she was standing and ensured that he never touched Jaganmatha. Hearing this secret, Sita devi's worries lessened a bit.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asks Do I have a noble heart like Thirijatai to share a secret and there by assuage the fears of the divine Mother.

19. அவள் தெய்வமென்றேனோ மண்டோதரியைப் போலே!

She says Did I like Mandodari say that Rama is the God.

Mandodari the wife of Ravana was a parama pathivratha. Even at the height of her grief, when she lost her husband in the battle field, when she saw Rama she spontaneously said that He was none other than Narayana lying down on Adishesha at Thirupparkadal. Such was her great gnana.

The lady of Thirukkolor says Do I have such a wisdom as to identify the true God in the form of Rama?

20. அஹம் வேத்மி யென்றேனோ விக்ஷாமித்திரனைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Visvamitra say Ahamvedhmi?

This again is an incident from Ramayana. Visvamitra and other rishis met Dasaratha and asked him to send Rama to help them to keep at bay the demons who were disturbing the yaga performed by the rishis in Siddha vanam. Dasaradha out of his fatherly anxiety told Visvamitra that his son Rama was not even sixteen years old and that He was a young boy. The rishi then got angry and said O Dasaradha! Rama is not so young as you think. I know who He is (Ahamvedmi) I say He is a Mahatma, a true warrior and saviour.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore says did I like Viswamitra have the gnana to identify the Perumal in the human form as Rama?

21. தேவுநற்றறிவேனோ மதுரகவியார் போலே!

The lady asks Did I like Madurakavi Alwar say that I seek none else but my acharya?

Madurakavi Alwar was a great follower of Nammalwar. He composed Kanninun Siru thambu, a divya prabandha in honour of Nammalwar and said tht he knows none else but his acharya Nammalwar. With such sincere acharya bakthi itself, he attained moksha.

The lady from Thirukkolor therefore says that she did not have gnanam and acharya bakthi like Madurakavi Alwar.

22. தெய்வத்தைப் பெற்றேனோ தேவகியாரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Devaki give birth to Perumal?

Devaki was the sister of Kamsa. Kamsa knew the the eighth child born to his sister Devaki would be the cause of his death. He therefore kept Devaki and Vasudeva imprisoned and killed all the seven children born to them. When the eighth child was born, the child was beautiful to look at. It was born with shanku and chakra. Devaki then requested the Perumal to hide His weapons and be like a normal child and save himself.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore says that like Devaki she had no tapobalam to be a mother for Perumal himself. She says that she is not blessed as to be so fortunate.

23. ஆழிமறை யென்றேனோ வசுதேவரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Vasudeva ask Perumal to hide the weapons?

As stated in the earlier paragraph when Devaki gave birth to her eighth child, the child was born with the pancha ayudhams. Devaki and Vasudeva realised that it was God Himself. Vasudeva then told the child that Kamsa was waiting to kill him. Please hide your Azhi (Chakra) so that Kamsa may not notice your divine form. The child immediately obeyed its father's directive and thus illustrated pitru vakya paripalana concept.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Do I have that love and affection (parivu) like Vasudeva to worry about protecting the Sarva rakshaka Perumal Himself? is great Protection.

24. ஆயனை வளர்த்தேனோ யசோதையாரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Yasodha bring up Krishna?

Krishna though born to Devaki and Vasudeva was taken to Ayarpadi across the Yamuna and left with Nandagopan and Yasodha to be brought up. Thus, while he was born to Devaki, the pleasure and the pain of bringing up the child rested with Yasodha.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asks Did I have the good fortune to bring up Krishna with motherly love and affection like Yasodha?

25. அநுயாத்திரை செய்தேனோ அணிலங்களைப் போலே!

She asks like the squirrels did I do my small bit to help Perumal?

This refers to an incident that occurred while building the Sethu bridge across the ocean to go to Lanka. The monkey warriors like Hanuman, Angathan, Nalan, Neelan, Kumudhan etc. carried huge boulders put them in the ocean to build the bridge. Seeing them at work, two tiny squirrels decided to do their bit. They would jump into the water get their body wet, then roll in the sands and go back to the site where the bridge was being built, shake their body and deposit the mud stuck on its body at the site. Seeing this, Rama with affection patted the squirrels on their back with His three fingers. This act of love left its imprint on the squirrels back.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Did I do any job big or small with sincere bakthi like the squirrels?

26. அவல் பொரியை யீந்தேனோ குகேலரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Kuchela offer fried grain (Aval) to Krishna?

This is a well known incident in Krishnavataram. Krishna and Kuchela were great friends, while they were studying under

Sandheepini rishi. Later Krishna ruled over Dwaraka. Kuchela got married to Susila, had twenty seven children and was wallowing in poverty. After a lot of persuasion from his wife, one day Kuchela agreed to meet Krishna and seek His help to relieve him of his poverty. All that he could afford to offer to Krishna when he met him was the dried rice grain. But Krishna ate that simple repast with a lot of appreciation and said that it was better than the feast that he had in Vidhura's house and the milk he drank in Ayarpadi and the butter he ate in Gokulam.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether she had even taken the insignificant dry paddy cavul to worship the Perumal who is always mightily pleased with offerings be it pathram, pushpam, phalam or thoyam, etc. provided it is offered with sincere bhakthi.

27. ஆயுதங்கள் ஈந்தேனோ அகஸ்தியர் போலே!

She asks Did I like Agastiar give the weapons to Perumal?

During Ramavataram when Rama, Lakshmana and Sita came to the asrama of Agastya rishi, the sage with his gnana drusti knew about the purpose of the birth of Rama. He welcomed them did all the satkaras, advised them to live in panchavathi on the banks of the river Godaveri and entrusted to Rama a number of astras (weapons).

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks was I of any help to Perumal like Agastya rishi who provided the weapons?

28. அந்தரங்கம் புகுகேனோ சஞ்சயனைப் போலே!

She asks was I a confidant like Sanjaya?

Sanjaya was a minister of Druthrashtra, the kaurava king. Though Druthrashtra and Sanjaya would be seated in the palace, with his gnana drusti, Sanjaya could see what all was transpiring on the battle field at Kurukshetra. He would relate whatever he saw to the blind king Drutharashtra. Thus, it was even the Githopadesam given by Krishna to Arjuna was related in great detail by Sanjaya to Druthrashtra.

The Thirukkolor lady asks are my actions motivated by affection, trust and confidence as in the case of Sanjaya?

29. கர்மத்தால் பெற்றேனோ ஜனகரைப் போலே!

The lady asks like Janaka did I practice what was preached?

This refers to an incident in the life of Janaka. When Janaka was studying with Yagnavalkyar he was his teacher's favourite and naturally the envy of other students. Yagnavalkyar hit upon a plan to make the other students realise their shortcomings. One day two warriors came running into the class room and shouted that Mithila town was burning. Immediately all the rishi putras ran helter skelter clutching their kamandalam and whatever else they owned. But Janaka alone stayed calm where he was. Yagnavalkyar asked him why he did not try to escape. Janaka replied "Swami! in this world nothing belongs to me. Everything belongs to God". The rishi putras who heard this reply understood why Janaka was head and shoulders above all others. This small dhrama was enacted at the instance of Yagnavalkyar. Mithila was not burning. But he created the panic so as to prove that Janaka was a Karmanush-tanar. i.e. a person who lived upto the dharmic principles taught to him. He put into practice without batting an eye lid the profound philosophy taught to him by his teacher. That is why Sita became his daughter and Perumal his son-in-law.

The lady from Thirukkolor asks Am I such a principled dharmic person like Janaka?

30. கடித்து சுவளைக் கண்டேனோ திருமங்கையார் போலே!

She asks was I blessed with God realisation after biting Him?

Thirumangai Alwar was the chieftain of a small kingdom. He wanted to marry Kumudavalli who stipulated that he should feed 1008 brahmins for one whole year before marrying her. The king spent all his money. Later he had to even beg, borrow and steal. He took to highway robbery. Once God and Thayar

dressed up as a bride and a groom bedecked with jewellery, came to Thirumanamkollai. That night alwar was waiting at that place to waylay any rich traveller who passed that way. He saw the young bride and the groom dressed up in all their finery. He waylaid them, removed all the jewellery. Only the ring worn on the toe of the foot of the Thayar would not come out. The king bent and bit that ring, broke it and removed it. When he touched the foot of consort gnana dawned on him. He also found that the jewellery which he had tied up in a bundle was so heavy that he could not lift it. He thought it was some inexplicable magic. He asked the bridegroom as to what was the magic that he had wielded on him. Perumal then initiated Thirumangai mannan into the beauty and significance of Ashtakshara mantram.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Did I have such an opportunity as to kiss the foot of goddess though it be accidentally and then attain gnana?

31. குடை முதலானது ஆனேனோ அனந்தாழ்வான் போலே!

She asks Did I do different types of Kainkaryas to Perumal like Adishesha?

Adishesha is inseperable from God. It is said he is the throne on which the Perumal sits. He is the umbrella and the wooden sandals for God. He is the bed when He sleeps. He is the pillow for God's head. He is the cloth (pithambaram) for Him.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks have I rendered the different types of service (Kainkarayam) to the Lord as to be specially blessed by Him?

32. கொண்டு திரிந்தேனோ திருவடியைப் போலே!

She asks did I carry Perumal on my shoulder like Thiruvadi?

Peria Thiruvadi is Garuda. Siriya Thiruvadi is Hanuman. During the Rama Ravana Yuddha, Hanuman saw that Ravana

was seated on a chariot while Rama was standing on the battle field. He therefore lifted Rama, seated Him on his shoulders and ran about the battle field, thus acted as a chariot for Rama.

The lady therefore asks Did I have the rare opportunity like Hanuman to carry God on my shoulders?

33. இளைப்புவிடாய் தீர்தேனோ நம்பாடுவான் போலே!

She asks Did I live up to my word like Nampaduvan.

Nampaduvan was an ardent devotee of Thirukkurungudi Nambi. He belonged to the panchama kula. Every night he would go and sing before God. Once on one such occasion enroute he was accosted by a brahmarakshasa who wanted to kill him. He promised the brahmarakshasa that he would sing before the God complete his ekadasi vratha and return the next morning to be eaten by the demon. He kept his word. When the brahmarakshasa saw him the next morning he realised that he was a great soul. He fell at his feet and asked him to give some of the punya that he had accumulated by having such a deep devotion to God. Nampaduvan relented. The brahmarakshasa was released from the sins of his birth and attained moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks, Did I like Nampaduvan part with any punyam accumulated through my devotion so as to save another soul?

Do I have that depth of apara bakthi?

34. இடைகழியே கண்டேனோ முதலாழ்வார்களைப் போலே!

She asks Did I have the vision of the lord in a veranda like the first three alwars?

This story is also well known. Poigai Alwar, Bhoothath Alwar and Pey Alwar are known as the first three alwars. Once all of them separately reached Thirukkolor. It was raining heavily. They sought shelter in the verandah of a small house where they could with difficulty stand abreast. Suddenly they felt that there was another person in their midst. They wondered

why they were feeling crushed. Poigai Alwar is said to have used the bhoomi i.e. earth as a thagazhi i.e. receptacle and the water of the ocean (kadal neer) as the ghee, the Sun as the wick and lighted a lamp. Bhoothath alwar used love and affection as the receptacle, his belief as the ghee and his mind as the wick and lighted a gnana deepam. With the light cast by these two sources, the darkness was dispelled and Pey Alwar was able to see the divine vision. He burst out with the words "Thiru kanden, Pon meni kanden " i.e. I saw Thiru I saw the golden coloured body. First he had the vision of the dazzling golden effulgence of Thayar and only later he saw the dark hued Perumal.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks Did I like the first three alwars have deiva kataksha and enlightenment?

35. இருமன்னர் பெற்றேனோ வால்மீகரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I bring up two kings like Valmiki?

In the Ramayana listening to the loose words uttered by some citizens, Rama ordered Lakshmana to take Sita and leave her in the forest. Sita was then expecting a child. Lakshmana left her in the forest. She reached the asram of Valmiki who looked after her. She gave birth to a baby boy in that asram. One day Sita had left the child in the custody of the rishi and had gone to collect some water. But after some time she got worried that Valmiki may close his eyes in dyana and the child may get harmed by the wild animals in the forest. She therefore returned and took the child with her to collect the water. The rishi who knew about the child having been left in his custody, did not know about the subsequent act of Sita having taken the child with her. When he opened his eyes and found the child missing, he got worried. He is said to have taken a dharba grass and created another child looking exactly like the one left in his custody. Meantime Sita returned with the child. The two children were thus named Lava and Kusa.

Valmiki taught them all the arts. He made them recite the story of Rama which they later recited in front of Rama himself. The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks Did I have an

opportunity like Valmiki to bring up two royal children, teach them Ramayana and make them sing that divine story in front of Perumal Himself and give him pleasure and pain at the same time.

36. இருமாலையீந்தேனோ தொண்டரடிப் பொடியார் போலே!

She asks Did I author two garlands of verses on Perumal like Tondaradi Podi Alwar?

A person by name Vipra Narayana a devotee of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam used to weave garlands and offer them to the God. But once to his misfortune he fell into the clutches of a courtesan by name Devadevi and got into bad habits. It is said that God himself had a hand in correcting him. One day the golden bowl used in the temple for offering worship to Lord Ranganatha was brought and given to Devadevi. A little boy calling himself Alagia Manavala Dasan brought it and said that Vipra Narayana had asked that the bowl be delivered to her. The next day the bhattars saw the bowl missing. The king was informed. It was discovered in Devadevi's house and she was questioned. She then said that it was given to her by Vipra Narayana. Both of them were imprisoned. Later the Perumal appeared in the dream of the king and explained to him that this incident was enacted by him in order to make Vipra Narayana realise the futility of seeking the worldly pleasures. The imprisoned Vipra Narayana was released. He turned a new leaf and became the great Alwar known as Thondaradi podi alwar. The little boy Alagiya Manavala dasan was none other other Lord Ranganatha Himself.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks Did I have the apara bakthi and enlightenment like the devotee Vipra Narayana who first offered garlands (poomalai) to God and latter offered a garland of verses (paamalai) to Perumal. Pamalai i.e. garland of verses referred to by the Thirukkolor lady are Thiruppalli Ezhuchchi and Thirumalai written by Thondaradipodi Alwar alias Vipra Narayana.

37. அவனுரைக்கப் பெற்றேனோ திருக்கச்சியார் போலே!

She asks Did I like Tirukachi Nambi have an opportunity to converse with Perarulalan?

Tirukachi Nambi was a great scholar living in Kanchipuram. It is believed that while doing alavatta kainkaryam (i.e. fanning service to God perarulalan) he would carry on a conversation with Perumal. One day he noticed that a dhobi, a vaishnavite devotee was following him when he was returning after offering prayers on the banks of veghavati river. The dhobi would take mud from the spot on which Tirukachi Nambi's feet traversed and apply the dust on his head. Nambi asked him the reason for his strange behaviour. The dhobi replied that he was convinced that he would attain moksha by anointing on his head the dust from the feet of a great sage who had conversation with Perumal Himself. Tirukachi Nambi wanted to check with Perumal whether the dhobi would really attain moksha by this method.

Arulalan then told Thirukachi Nambi that the dhobi would attain moksha due to the baghavatha pada dhooli. Next day Thirukachi Nambi conveyed this to the vaishnavite devotee. The devotee then asked as to when Thirukachi Nambi would attain moksha, as he wanted to be associated with Tirukachi Nambi till such time as he attains moksha. Accordingly Tirukachi Nambi asked this question of God. God then told him that baghavadhabimanam i.e. devotion to a devotee of the Lord only will ensure moksha. Tirukachi Nambi therefore decided to go to Srirangam and become a devotee of another acharya and thus ensure his own moksha. It is said he assumed the role of a cow herd and joined the retinue of Peria Nambi. He grazed the cattle and served Peria Nambi for a long time. One day when Peria Nambi started visiting some villages this cow herd became the bullock cart driver for Peria Nambi. Enroute they had heavy rains. They returned to Srirangam. Soon Peria Nambi saw through the guise adopted by his cow herd and asked him the reason for the disguise. On hearing the truth, he praised him for his singleminded devotion to attain moksha by adopting this method of baghavatha upacharam i.e. serving an acharya. Thus Tirukachi Nambi also ensured his moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore says that unlike Tirukachi Nambi she did not have an opportunity to converse with Perumal and know about the means of attaining moksha through baghavathabimanam.

38. அவள் மேனி ஆனேனோ திருப்பாணரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I merge with God like Thiruppanalvar?

Thiruppanalwar is one of the famous vaishnavite savants who is known for his great devotion to Lord Ranganatha. One day Lord Ranganatha appeared in the dream of Loka Sarangamuni and ordered him to bring Thiruppanalwar on his shoulders to his temple. Accordingly Lokasarangamuni met Thiruppanalwar on the banks of Cauvery and carried him on his shoulders to the precincts of Lord Ranganatha. The moment Thiruppanalwar saw the beautiful vigraha of Ranganatha, he burst into a spontaneous song describing the Perumal from the foot upwards to the hair. This is the famous Amalnadipiran. Finally he said that the eyes which have seen the God would not enjoy seeing any other thing and so saying he merged with Lord Ranganatha himself.

The lady of Thirukkolor says Did I have this great bakthi like Thiruppanalwar to become one with God?

39. அதுப்பி வையுமென்றேனோ வசிஷ்டரைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like Vasishtha order Dasaratha to send his sons with Visvamitra?

When Visvamitra approached Dasaratha to send Rama to help the rishis to perform the yaga, the king hesitated and thought that Rama was too young to shoulder such a great responsibility. Vasishtha who was the adviser to Dasaratha knew who Rama was. Therefore he told Dasaratha not to hesitate but to send Rama with Visvamitra. Dasaratha obeyed.

The lady from Thirukkolor asks Did I like Vasishtha know the future and advise the father to send his son to the forest?

40. அடிவாங்கினேனோ சொங்குப் பிராட்டியைப் போலே!

She asks Did I get acharya thiruvadi like Kongu piratti?

Ramanuja used to collect annabiksha from seven houses for cooking his daily meals. Once there was a severe drought in Kongu Nadu. One lady by name Sumathi from Kongu Nadu came to Srirangam. One day She met Ramanuja while he was on his Biksha rounds. Later she met him in the mutt and sought enlightenment from him. Ramanuja initiated her into the intricacies of Dwaya mantram and as she hailed from Kongu desa named her Kongu piratti. When she was returning to her place, she met Ramanuja to take leave of him. She requested him to give her some small memento which she would keep with her as a prasadam. Ramanuja gave her his paduka. The lady carried them with her and returned to Kongu Nadu.

The lady from Thirukkolor asks Did I have the thought, like Kongu piratti, that the Thiruvadi i.e. sandals of Acharya are everything to me? Here again, the impact of acharya bakthi is highlighted by the lady.

41. மண்பூவை மிட்டேனோ குருவநம்பியைப் போலே!

She asks "like Kuruva Nambi did I offer a flower made out of mud to God?"

A potter in Kuruvapuram would start his days work by offering a flowers made out of mud to an idol of Lord Venkatachalapathi also made out of mud by him. At Tirumalai the priests were intrigued to find that everyday at the feet of God along with the other flowers there would be some sweet smelling mud flowers. They reported this strange fact to their king Tondaiman. The king personally came and checked this miracle. He wanted to solve this mystery. One night Perumal appeared in the dream of the king and explained the whole thing. The king then visited the residence of the sincere devotee viz. the potter and saw that the mud flower offered by him to God had found their way to Tirupathi. Henceforth the potter came to be known as Kuruva Nambi i.e. the devotee of Kuruvapuram.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks do I have such a great bakthi like Kuruva Nambi. Have I offered mud flowers exuding in bakthi-manam to Lord Venkatachalapathi?

42. மூலமென் றழைத்தேனோ கஜராஜனைப் போலே!

She asks Did I, like Gajendra address Perumal as "Adimoolame" and seek His help?

This is an incident relating to the Ganjendra moksham story when Gajendra the elephant was caught by the crocodile. The elephant wanted to place the lotus collected by it at the feet of Perumal. He therefore cried out for help and addressed Perumal as Adimoolame! i.e. ultimate cause for entire creation. Perumal came rushing on His garuda vahanam and with His chakara severed the head of crocodile who was none other than a Ghandarva by name "Hoo-hoo". The Gandharva became a crocodile due to the curse of Devala rishi.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I like the elephant feel sad at not being able to offer the flower at the feet of Perumal and seek His help.

43. பூசக் கொடுத்தேனோ கூனியைப் போலே!

She asks Did I like the Hunchback offer sandal paste to Lord Krishna?

This refers to an incident that occurred during Krishna-vataram. Krishna and Balarama were invited to a "vil vizha" by Kamsa. As the two brothers were walking in the Raja veedhi i.e. Main street in Vadamadurai they met a hunchback carrying a bowl of sandal paste in her hands. They asked her for whom she was carrying the sandal paste? The hunchback was lost in admiration at the beauty of Krishna. She said she was known as Naikavakkirai, that her duty was to prepare sandal paste everyday, and take it to Kamsa. Krishna then asked her to give him the chandanam which would be fit to be applied by Him. Immediately she gave the best scented chandanam that she was taking for Kamsa to Lord Krishna. Krishna generously applied the paste on Himself and Balarama. He then held the chin of the hunchback in His two fingers and with the toes of His foot he held her feet firmly and straightened the lady. Lo and behold she was rid of her hunchback and became a beautiful damsel.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks Did I have bakthi like that hunchback as to endanger her very life by offering the sandal paste meant for her king to Krishna?

44. புவைக் கொடுத்தேனோ மாலாகாரரைப் போலே!

She asks did I offer a flower garland to Perumal like Malakarar?

This again is an incident in Krishnavataram. In response to the invitation of Kamsa, Krishna and Balarama came to Madurapuri. They walked the streets of the town. Enroute they met a flower garland maker by name Sudhaman (malakarar). They entered his house and asked for some flowers. The flower seller generously adorned his best garlands round the neck of Krishna and Balarama and said "Dhanyogam Archayashyam" i.e I am blessed to have this opportunity to adorn you with my best flowers. Krishna blessed him.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks did I have the unexpected good fortune, like the flower seller, to receive the Perumal Himself in my small hut?

45. வைத்த விடத்திருந்தேனோ பரதனைப் போலே!

She asks did I like Bharatha stay put in the place as ordered by Rama?

The lady refers to an incident in Ramavataram. As a consequence of Pitruvakyaparipalanam, Rama had to go to forests along with Lakshmana and Sita. Bharatha followed Rama and requested him to return to Ayodya. Rama explained to Bharatha the need for fulfilling a fathers word and the dangers in not obeying the wish of the father. Finally he consoled Bharatha, gave him his sandals and asked him to rule the kingdom with these sandals by his side. Bharatha kept those padhukas on his head and was very happy. He had no desire to enter Ayodaya. He therefore camped in Nandhi gramam a town on the outskirts of Ayodaya. He performed pattabhishekam to the sandals of Rama, donned the robes of a sanyasin and acted as a minister with the padhukas as the king and ruled the kingdom for fourteen years

until Rama returned. Thus, Bharatha was able to establish the might of Paratantram.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore says that unlike Bharatha she had no opportunity to obey absolutely the instructions of Perumal. "Para tantram" means obeying God's will. "Para" means Baghavan, "Tantra" means to act as per His words. The lady therefore says that she had no opportunity like Bharatha to carry out the instructions of Lord.

46. வழியடிமை செய்தேனோ லக்ஷ்மணனைப் போலே!

She asks did I have the opportunity like Lakshmana to serve the Lord.

This again refers to Ramavataram. When Rama went into the forest, Sita and Lakshmana followed him. Rama tried to dissuade them from accompanying him. Lakshmana said that to live without Rama would be as futile as a fish attempting to live outside water. Wherever Rama went Lakshmana followed and took great care of Lord during the vana vasa.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether she had the great fortune like Lakshmana to be of eternal service to Rama.

47. அக்கரைக்கே விட்டேனோ குகப்பெருமானைப் போலே!

She asks did I like Guha help the Lord in crossing the river?"

This again refers to an incident in Ramayana. When Rama had to go the forest Sumanthira took them in a chariot and left them on the banks of the Ganga river. Guha was the chieftain of Srungiberapuram on the banks of Ganges. When he saw Rama, he fell prostrate at His feet and offered hospitality in his humble kingdom. Rama was pleased with his affection and adopted him as His own brother. Guha helped Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to cross the river. It is said that while Lakshmana was guarding

Rama and Sita, Guha was keeping an eye on Lakshmana least he should do some ill to Rama! Such was the devoted protective attitude that Guha adopted towards Rama.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asks Did I render any yeomen service like Guha to Perumal?

48. அரக்கனுடன் பொருதேனோ பெருயவுடையாரைப் போலே!

She asks did I fight with the demon Ravana like Jatayu?"

This again is an incident in Ramayana. Carried away by beauty of the golden deer. Sita had sent Rama to catch the deer. The deer was Maricha the demon in disguise. An arrow let loose by Rama hurt the deer and even then the evil demon cried aloud "Ha Lakshmana Ha Seetha" giving an impression as if it was Rama who was crying for help. Hearing those cries, Seetha sent Lakshmana also to run to the rescue of Rama. At that time, Ravana came and abducted Sita. As he was carrying away Sita, Jatayu, an old bird offered resistance to Ravana. The demon cut the wings of the bird with the sword given to him by Lord Siva. Jatayu fall down on the ground. But the valiant bird would not give up its life. It waited with bated breath for Rama and Lakshmana to come that way, so that it could give some information on the path taken by the demon. Finally only after fulfilling its task, the bird died. Rama did all the samskaras to the bird as if he was the son. He conferred moksha on the valiant bird.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I render any such great service like Jatayu as to be blessed by the Lord.

49. இக்கரைக்கே சென்றேனோ விபீஷணரை போலே!

She asks Did I like Vibhishana chage sides?

This again is an incident in Ramayana when Vibhishana sought saranagathi at the feet of Rama after having failed to convince Ravana to mend his ways and atone for the wrong that he had done in abducting Sita.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether she had the wisdom like Vibhishana to give up attachment to all family ties and surrender at the feet of Perumal. Ikkarai refers to Perumal and a Situation where one can stay with Perumal.

50. இனியதொன்று பைத்தேனோ சபரியைப் போலே!

The lady asks, Did I like Sabari taste every fruit and keep for God only the sweet ones?"

This again refers to Ramayana. Sabari was a hunter woman who was staying in Madanga asram in Rishyamukha hill. Knowing that Rama would be coming that way, she would collect all the fruits, taste them and only the sweet fruits, she retained for Rama and discarded the others. When ultimately Rama came, he accepted and enjoyed the fruits offered with such devotion by Sabari. Alagiya Manavala Perumal Nayanar in his Acharya Hrudhayam refers to this bhojanam of Rama as one amongst the three types of bhojanas. One is samyak bhojanam which is the type offered by Sabari. The second type is saguna bhojanam which is the type offered by Vidhura. The third type is known as Saha bhojanam. This was the type when the Lord sat along with the Vanaras in Bharadwaja asram and ate His meal.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks did I like Sabari have unbounded affection and bakthi towards Perumal as to carefully select the fruits that were to be offered to Him?

51. இங்கு முன்டென்றேனோ பிரமதூலாதனைப் போலே!

She asks did I like Prahaladha assert that God was present everywhere and also in the specific pillar pointed by Hiranya Kasipu?

The story of Prahaladha is very well known. Hiranya Kasipu tortured the child devotee merely because he was having complete faith in Narayana. Once out of frustrated frenzy, Hiranya Kasipu asked his child whether his Narayana was in a particular pillar. Prahlada asserted that God was everywhere

including that pillar. In his demoniac frenzy Hiranya Kasipu kicked that pillar. It is said that the pillar was a part of the palace of Hiranya Kasipu. The demon was therefore very certain that God could not be concealed in that pillar. But in response to the devotion of the child God in the form of Narasimha emerged out of that pillar and tore apart the demon with his finger nails.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks "Like Prahaladha do I have gnanam born out of firm unshakeable belief to say without hesitation that God is everywhere.

52. இங்கில்லை யென்றேனோ ததிபாண்டனைப்
போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Dahibandan say that Krishna is not here".

This is a story in Krishnavataram. One day Yasodha was angry with Krishna for breaking the curd pots. She wanted to punish him. The child Krishna ran away and hid himself in the hut of Dahibandan. He was a seller of huge pots. Krishna requested Dahibandan to tell Yasodha that He was not there. As anticipated when Yasodha came searching for Krishna, Dahibanda said tha Krishna had not come there. But after Yasodha left when Krishna wanted to be released from inside the pot, Dahibandan extracted from Krishna a promise that he would confer moksha on him in return for the help rendered. Krishna accordingly coferred moksha on Dahibandan.

The lady of Thikkolor therefore asks do I have the affection, the kindness and at the same time courage like Dahibandan who out of kindness and affection saved Krishna from the wrath of Yasodha and by his courage extracted moksha from Krishna.

53. இங்கில்லை யென்றேனோ ததிபாண்டனைப்
போலே!

She asks, "Did I go to the forest like Perumal?"

This refers to Ramayana. As is well known, Dasaratha had promised a boon to Kaikayee. When Dasaratha was planning

to celebrate pattabishekam for Rama, kaikayee chose that time to choose her boon and asked Dasaradha to banish Rama to the forest for 14 years.

This lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks did I like Rama go to the forest to fulfill the promise given by the father and to set an example to the people on the concept of pitruvakya paripalanam.

54. கண்டு வந்தேனென்றேனோ திருவடியைப் போலே!

Sne asks did I like Hanuman say I have seen Sita?

This refers to an incident that occurred in Ramayanam. Rama and his army of monkey warriors were searching for Sita who was abducted by Ravana. Hanuman crossed the ocean, went to Lanka and discovered Sita in the forest. He gave the ring worn by Rama to Sita as proof that he was a Rama dhoot. Similarly, he collected the choodamani from Sita to deliver to Rama. When he returned Hanuman felt that he must convey the good news immediately and said "Drushta Sita" i.e., I saw Sita. Thus the glad news is given in brevity and direct to the point.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks did I like Hanuman render any special service to Perumal? Did I do any special job which brought so much of happiness to the perumal and people surrounding Him?

55. இருகையும் விட்டேனோ திரௌபதியைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I throw up both my hands like Drowpathi?"

This is an incident from Mahabharatha. The kauravas had decided to humiliate Drowpathi by disrobing her in the mahasabha. She appealed to Drutharashtra, Bhishma and other elders in the sabha. But all of them were helpless. At that time she lost all hope and cried out for help to God. Krishna rushed to her rescue and ensured that there was an unending stream of cloth on her, so that the Kauvara prince was not able to disrobe her.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether like Drowpathi she ever raised her hands and sought the sole protection of the Supreme Saviour?

56. இங்குப் பால் பொங்குமென்றேனோ வடுகநம்பியைப் போலே!

She asks "Did I like Vaduga Nambi ever say that have to stay back as the milk is likely to boil over?"

The Thirukkolor lady here refers to an incident which occurred in the life history of Ramanuja. One of the great devotees of Ramanuja was Vaduga Nambi. He was a great baghavatha baktha. Once when Ramanuja and he went to Srirangam and the former was lost in admiring the beauty of Ranganatha, the latter was lost in Admiring the beauty of Ramanuja! Meantime, the utsava vigraha of perumal had come to the street in front of Ramanuja's house. Udaiyavar came outside the house to worship the utsava vigraha. He shouted out to Vaduga nambi to also come and offer prayers to perumal. Vaduga Nambi then replied "If I were to come to worship your God, the milk which I am heating for my God will boil over and go to waste. I cannot therefore come now". This incident speaks volumes about the acharya bakthi which Vaduga Nambi had for his teacher.

The Thirukkolor lady therefore asks did I ever evince such a high degree of acharya bakthi like Vaduga Nambi?

57. இருமிடறு பிடித்தேனோ செல்வபி பிள்ளையைப் போலே!

She asks "Did I like Chella Pillai ever hug Ramanuja?"

This again refers to an incident in the life history of Ramanuja. Once Ramanuja went to Thirunarayanapuram (melkote). He found that the moolavar as well as the utsava vigraha were missing. One day he dreamt that the moola vigraha was lying hidden in an ant hill. The next day, he located the ant hill, discovered the vigraha of Thirunarayana. He then persuaded the king to renovate the temple, re- instal the idol and do abishekam. He also wanted to locate the utsava murthi.

Again he had a dream when he was told that Ramapriya, the utsava vigraha was in the custody of the Badsha of Delhi. Ramanuja went all the way to Delhi and pleaded with Badsha to surender Ramapriya. The Badsha said that he was having a number of idols in his custody and if his Ramapriya would respond and come to his call he was free to take it. Ramanuja then sang a song and invited Ramapriya to come to him. Even as small child wound run to its mother, to the astonishment of one an all, the idol of Ramapriya came, sat on the lap of Ramanuja. Even as Ramanuja hugged the idol, kissed it as if he had found his long lost child, Ramapriya also hugged Ramanuja with both its hands. The perumal came to be called henceforth as Chella Pillai i.e., the fond child of Ramanuja.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, like Chella Pillai did I show unbounded affection towards my father and hug him?

58. நில்லென்று பெற்றேனோ இளையாற்றுக்குடி நம்பி-
யைப் போலே!

She asks, "Like Ilayatrakudi Nambi was I ever asked to stay by God".

Ilayatrakudi Nambi was a great devotee of Sri Ranganatha. He would visit Srirangam on all the important festivals, offer worship and then till the next festival be thinking only of what happened at the last festival. One day after he returned from Srirangam, the people in his house called him for food. Ilayatrakudi Nambi was thinking of the last festival. He therefore replied the other utsavam is nearing. In course of time, he became very old. he could not go to Srirangam for the first day Ankurarpana festival. It is said that God himself wondered as to why Ilayatrakudi Nambi had not come. On the sixth day of the utsava Nambi was able to make it to Srirangam. he then told God that because of his advancing age, he was not able to come on time. God then asked him to stay in that very same place. In due course, He gave him moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether she had earned the grace and the kindness of God like Ilayatrakudi Nambi?

59. நெடுந்தூரம் போனேனோ நாதமுனியைப் போலே

She asks, "Did I like Nathamuni go very far searching for God?"

Nathamuni is one of the great vaishnavite philosophers. One day his sishyas told him that while he was in his dyana, two people holding the bow and a lady and a monkey had come to see him. Immediately, Nathamuni felt that it was Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman who had come to give him darshan and that he had missing seeing the God. Immediately, he started going in search of those persons. Enroute, he saw the footprints of a monkey. Even today this place is known as Kurangadi i.e. the foot step of the monkey. He went farther and then saw flowers strewn on the ground. Even today there is a village near Chidambaram which is known as poovizhundha nallur i.e. a good town where the flowers from Sita's head had fallen. In spite of his following these landmarks and trying to search the direction taken by the God, he could not meet them. He fell down there itself and attained moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks did I like Nathamuni go searching the Paramporul i.e. God?

60. அவன் போனான் என்றேனோ மாருதியாண்டான் போலே!

She asks "Did I like Maruthiandan say. "He is no more?"

One Chola King wanted to establish the supremacy of Lord Siva. He would write on a paper "Sivath Paradharma nasti" i.e., there is no God other than Siva and ask the scholars to sign and thus accept the statement. Some out of fear would sign. One day, he invited Kurattalvan and Emberumanar to come to his sabha. Kurattalvan was aware as to the purpose for which they were being invited to the sabha. He wanted to save Emberumanar from the embarrassment. So he asked Emberumanar to go away to Melkote. Kurattalvan and peria Nambi went to the King's Court. As expected, the king asked them to endorse the statment "Sivathpara Dharma Nast". peria Nambi refused to

sign that statement. The king ordered his eyes to be plucked out. Kurattalvan was also asked to sign the statement. He instead wrote underneath that statement the statement "Dronamasti thatah param". Here there was a pun and play on the words. Sivam while referring to God, also is used to refer to a measure i.e., a padi. Dronam also refers to a marakkal padi i.e., measure which is slightly bigger than Sivam. Kurattalvan therefore wrote that dhronam i.e., marakkal padi is the bigger measure than Sivam. Seeing this, the king got even more furious. But before he could order the eyes of Kurattalvan to be plucked out, the Alvan himself plucked his eyes out. In due course, the Chola king died. Maruthi Siriyandan one of Ramanujas disciples staying in Trichy came all the way to Melkote to convey this news to Ramanuja. At that time. Ramanuja was offering prayers on the banks of a pond. Maruti andan prostrated at his feet and said he is no more, Udaiyavar was very happy on hearing these words, hugged Maruthiandan and said 'kalyan' i.e, good news. Since, that day, the pond on whose banks this happy news was conveyed came to be known as "Kalyan Saras".

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks did I carry any good message to my acharya like Maruthiandan?

61. அவன் வேண்டா என்றேனோ ஆழ்வானைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Kurattalvan say that I do not want Him?."

One day Kurattalvan was going to visit Lord Ranganatha in the Srirangam temple. He was accosted by a guard of the Chola King. The guard asked "Aren't you the sishya of Ramanuja?" Kurattalvan replied in the affirmative. Immediately, the guard said that he should not enter the temple because he was a sishya of Ramanuja. He said that if he denied his connection with his acharya, and disowned him he would be permitted to enter the temple. Without hesitating even for a minute, Kurattalvan replied if I can have the darshan of the Lord only by disassociating myself from my acharya, I would much rather give offering worship to the Perumal in this temple. I do not want such a God and returned to his asram.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, "Did I like Kurattalvan display great acharya bakthi and say that the place where the name of the acharya cannot be mentioned, even if it be a temple, is not worth visiting. Here again, the Thirukkolor lady highlights the significance of acharya bakthi and baghavatha sambandam.

62. அத்வைதம் வென்றேனோ எம்பெருமானோரைப் போலே !

She asks, "Did I like Emberumanar establish the supremacy of Dwaitham in a discussion?"

This refers to an incident in the life of Ramanuja. There was a brahmin by name Yagnamurthi. He went to Kasi and had his bath in the Ganges. He then had discussions with all the scholars and thus established his supremacy. One day he heard about the fame of Emberumanar. He decided to have a debate with Emberumanar himself on this issue of supremacy between dwaitham and advaitham. He came all the way to Thiruvarangam, met Emberumanar and invited him for a discussion. It was agreed if Ramanuja won Yagnamurthi would then carry the sandals of Ramanuja and display the vaishnavite castemark on his forehead and join vaishnavism. On the other hand if Ramanuja was defeated, he was to take to grantha sanyasa i.e., give up all religious books and become a recluse. It was decided the discussion would be concluded within a maximum of eighteen days. A serious discussion with arguments and counter - arguments lasted for 16 days, with neither side establishing its supremacy. On the 17th day, Ramanuja was not able to answer some of the arguments purforth by Yagnamurthi. Yagnamurthi then said that they could withdraw for the day and have the final round on the 18th day i.e., the next day. That night Ramanuja went to the mutt, prayed to Perarulan and said O God: Is this a leela of Yours? If I get defeated, vaishnavism, nurtured by so many great souls will be lost and all the good work done from the Alwars downwards will be set at naught. He said it was upto God to protect Vaishnavism. That night Ramanuja went to bed without eating any food. That night Devaperumal appeared in his dream and told him that there was no need for

him to be perturbed. He assured him that Yagnamurthi would become his sisya. He advised him to follow the arguments mentioned in his Paramacharya Alavanda's book. Accordingly, the next day, Ramanuja argued that agnanam acts as a screen and hides gnanam. Thus agnanam hides Brahman which is gnana roopam. Therefore, there are two things one is agnanam and the other is Brahman and like Brahma avidya also does not get destroyed. As there are two identities viz., brahman and avidya, it has to be accepted that dwaitham and not advaitham is superior. He concluded by saying that as a result, a great elephant advaitham gets submerged and loses its feet, in the waters of dwaitham".

Yagnamurthi accepted this convincing argument. He gave up his Ekadhandam (all the saivite sanya sins have one thandam). He fell at the feet of Ramanuja. Ramanuja lifted him, embraced him and gave him a Tridandam and kashayam and re-named him as "Arulala Perumal Emberumanar" i.e. he combined the name of Arulala Perumal along with his name Emberumanar and rechristened Yagnamurthi. Thus, it was with the help of Kanchi Perumal, Ramanuja was able to establish the victory of Dwaitham.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks "Did I ever like Emberumanar participate in a philosophic discussion and win the day for dwaitham?"

63. அந்நாழங் கண்டேனோ நல்லானைப் போலே!

She asks "Did I like Nallan have an opportunity to be blessed by God?"

A vaishnavite brahmin used to go to the river and have his daily bath. One day he saw an unclaimed corpse lying on the river bank. The corpse had the pancha samskara marks. He therefore felt that though the corpse was not claimed by anybody, in as much as it had the pancha samskara marks on it, he should cremate that corpse and do all the final rites as per the sastras. He acted accordingly. However, the people in the village did not accept this noble act as they felt that the dead

person was of a low caste (panchama kulam) and this brahmin should not have performed the last rites to that corpse. They enforced a social boycott on that brahmin. However, Perumal appreciated this bold act of the vaishnavite who irrespective of caste and community had performed the funeral rites to that body. He appeared before that vaishnavite and said, you are a bad person in the eyes of this town. But in my eyes, you are a good person (nattukku pollan, namakku nallan). Perumal said that henceforth that vaishnavite will be known as Nallan Chakravarthi. Since that day, all the descendents of that noble soul carry this name conferred on him by Perumal Himself.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, was I so fortunate like Nallan Chakravarthi as to be blessed by the Lord Himself?

64. அனந்தபுரம் நுக்கேனோ ஆளவந்தாரைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Alavandar go to Thiruvananthapuram?"

This refers to an incident in the life of Thiruvavang Perumal Araiya. Araiya are a particular class of people who will do abhinaya to God and sing songs in His praise. One day Thiruvavang Perumal Araiya sang the following song on Lord Padmanabha of Thiruvananthapuram. He sang this pasuram from Thiruvaimozhi with abinaya and went on repeating the words, "go soon to Thiruvananthapuram". Alavandar who was listening to this song of the ariya immediately took leave of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, as well as of the ariya, left his mutt in charge of his sishya Deivavari Andan and proceeded to Thiruvananthapuram and offered worship at the feet of Lord Padmanabha. Thus, Alavandar accepted and acted as per the song sung by the Araiya.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks "Did I ever act as advised by great persons like Araiya and follow the call of God? Did I ever follow the path shown to me by the great people?"

65. ஆரியனைப் பிரிந்தேனோ தெய்வவாரியாண்டா-
னைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Deivavari Andan ever suffer due to seperation from acharya?"

Deivavari Andan was a sishya of Alavandar. As stated in the previous question, before going to Thiruvananthapuram Alavandar had left him incharge of the mutt in Srirangam. Due to the absence of his Guru, the sishya became very thin. The doctors who examined him, felt his illness was more due to mental reasons and not any physical cause. Deivavari Aandan confirmed that his only disease was the seperation from his acharya. Immediately, the people there decided that the best cure would be to take him to Trivandrum to meet his acharya. They seated him in a palanquin and took him all the way to Trivandrum. Midway Alavandar himself was camping on the banks of Karaimanal river. On seeing his sishya, Alavandar wondered as to how the sishya whom he had left to be incharge of the mutt had come here. Deivavari Andan on sighting Alavandar ran and fell at his feet. Alavandar asked him why he was looking so pale and why he had come there? The other sishyas who has accompanied Deivavari Andan told Alavandar that just as the fish could not survive outside water and even as the Chakravarthi Thirumagan (i.e. Lakshmana) could not stay away from Rama, this sishya could not survive without his teacher Alavandar. His disease was caused by the seperation from his acharya. Alavandar embraced Deivavari Andan, showed him the temple tower of Lord Padmanabha and advised him also to go and offer worship to Lord Padmanabha lying down on the thousand hooded serpent Adishesha. The disciple then replied, why should I go and worship the Lord there, when my lord is in front of my eyes? Alavandar was taken aback by this statement. The teacher and the discipile then returned to Srirangam.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I ever suffer from any such pangs of seperation from my acharya?

66. அந்தாதி சொள்ளேனோ ஆமுதனாரைப் போலே!

She asks, did I like Thiruvarangathu Amudhanar praise my acharya?

A vaishnavite devotee by name Peria kovil Nambi was well-versed in the sastras. One day Emberumanar asked Kurattalvan

to adopt this person as a sishya and initiate him deeper into the vaishnavite philosophy. Kurattalvan accepted him as a disciple. Later, Peria kovil nambi wrote the Gayathri. Emberumanar heard this and gave him the title Amudhan. Henceforth Periakovil Nambi used to be known as Thiruvarangathu Amudanar and the Gayathri book that he wrote was known as Prapanna Gayathri. In that Gayathri, Thiruvarangathu Amudanar had in the 7th pasuram mentioned his teacher Kurattalwan.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks, Did I like Thiruvarangathu Amudanar sing the praise of my acharya?

67. அநுகூலஞ் சொன்னேனோ மாலியவானைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Malyavan offer good advise?

Malyavan was the grandfather of Ravana. When Sri Rama and the warrior Monkey had come to Lanka to fight with Ravana, Malyavan advised Ravana to make peace with Rama. He told him that while Ravana had obtained the boon that he would not meet his end at the hands of devas, rishis and gandharvas, he had not obtained immunity at the hands of a mere mortal and the monkeys.

Malyavan therefore reminded Ravana that Rama who was a mortal and his warrior army consisting of monkeys would be the nemesis for Ravana. He also said that Rama was none other than Sri Vishnu Himself. He therefore advised him to fall at the feet of Rama and save his life.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I like Malyavan offer good words of advise to an evil minded person?

68. கள்வனிலென்றேனோ லோககுருவைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Sukracharya (Loka guru) say, that He is a kalvan?

This refers to Vamanavatara. When Perumal in the form of Vamana, a diminutive brahmachary appeared before Bali,

Sukrachary saw through the disguise. He knew it was Maha Vishnu who had come. Sukracharya tried to prevent Bali Chakravarthy from acceding to the apparently simple and small request of the dimunitive brahmachary. He told him that the dimunitive form was only a disguise and that it was Perumal Himself who had come. He addressed the Perumal as "Kalvan" i.e. one who has mesmerised us with His beauty. Mahabali did not listen to these words of advice and agreed to gift the three feet of land requested by Vamana. To confirm this gift, he was about to pour water from the kamandalam that he was holding, on to the hands of the brahmachary. Even at that late moment, Sukrachari tried to prevent solemnising the gift arrangement by taking the form of a beetle and blocking the nozzle of the kamandalam and preventing the water from flowing out of the kamandalam. Perumal knew this. He took a pavithram (dharba grass), He was having in His hand and poked the nostril as if He was cleaning it. It actually poked the eye of the beetle who was Sukrachary himself. Vamana then assumed the Viswaroopa, covered the entire worlds with two steps and asked of Mahabali where was the land for the third step as promised. Mahabali bent his head and offered that as the resting place for the third step.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks whether like Sukracharya, the Loka guru, she had ever addressed the Perumal as kalvan i.e. one who with his gunas, the beauty and acts had captivated the minds and hearts of the people?

69. கடலோசையென்றேனோ பெரியநம்பியைப் போலே!

She asks, "Did I like Peria Nambi say that it is as meaningless as the sound of the ocean waves?"

Maraneru Nambi was one of the sishyas of Alavandar. He belonged to Panchama kulam. One day Alavandar and his followers were going on a yathra. They reached a village by name Prantakam. They noticed that a person standing in the field took a fist of mud in his hand, mixed it with water and ate it to satisfy his hunger. Seeing this, Alavandar was surprised and went and asked him as to why he was eating mud when there were various

other food articles created by God to satisfy one's hunger? The man then replied that he was eating the mud so as to strengthen his body which was made of mud (From dust thou art and to dust thou return). Immediately Alavandar exclaimed, that this person was like Maran Sadagopan i.e. Nammalwar, who was enlightened and wise from the day of his birth itself. Alavandar therefore named that person as Maraneri Nambi. He asked him to follow him as his disciple. Maraneri Nambi expressed some reservations as he belonged to the chandala community. Alavandar then said, that there was no such thing as caste and community, so far as gnanas are concerned and said that without any hesitation, he should join his group. He took him to Srirangam, asked him to live on the banks of the river Cauvery. One day Alavandar went to worship Lord Ranganatha. God appeared before him and promised him immediate moksham. Hearing that Alavandar said, O God! I still have to atone for some of the sins that I have committed. How could I get moksha now? God replied, that he may give the balance of his sins to anyone of his sishyas and give up his mortal coils. Alavandar returned to his ashram and related to his disciples all that transpired in the temple. He asked whether any of his sishyas would volunteer to take up the balance of his sins? All except one, remained silent. The one who offered to bear those sins, was Maraneri Nambi. Alavandar asked him to come close to him. Maraneri Nambi again replied that he was a chandalan and it is prescribed that he should stay far away. Alavandar then replied, that he did not belong to the chandala kulam and asked him what he wanted. Maraneri Nambi again confirmed that he wanted the prasadam of atoning for the balance of the sins of Alavandar. Alavandar then asked him whether he was prepared to bear all that burden? Maraneri Nambi said that he would regard it as a maha prasadam and begged of Alavandar to give him that opportunity. Alavandar accepted the offer and he upbraided the other disciples and pulled them up saying that they did not have the faith which Marneri Nambi, though born in a low caste had. Later Mareneri Nambi was afflicted with the illness of his acharya. He however never complained as it was a service that he was rendering to his acharya. Peria Nambi, one of the disciples of Alavandar, was impressed by this act of Marneri Nambi. He therefore used to cook the food in

his house and send it to Marneri Nambi. One day Maraneri Nambi told Peria Nambi, that three days from that day, he would be giving up his mortal coils. He said that if during the last moments, he uttered the words Govinda and kesava and then gave up his life, then he should cremate the body, have his bath in pushkarini and return to his house. If on the other hand, he breathed his last while uttering the great qualities of the Alvars, then he asked him to cremate his body, have a kanta snanam and then return home. If on the other hand he thought of nothing else except the holy feet of his acharya, Alavandar, in his last moment, then he asked him to perform the last rites as per the prescribed procedure and then wash his feet and return to his house. As predicted, on the third day, Maraneri Nambi gave up his life. In the last moment, he was thinking only of his acharya Alavandar. As soon as he passed away, Peria Nambi followed his instructions, performed the prescribed rites for ten days and on the 10th day did Thiruadyayanam also. The other Sri Vaishnavas questioned Peria Nambi as to how he could perform the funeral rites as per the procedures to a person who was born in the panchama kula. They boycotted him. One day, when Peria Nambi was alone, Udaiyavar met him and asked, Swami! when Maraneri Nambi died, you could have called one of us like me and asked us to perform the last rites. Instead you performed the rites and this had upset many in this world. Peria Nambi smiled and replied, I am not greater than Rama or Dharmaputra, neither was Maraneri Nambi less than Jatayu or Vidhura. Jatayu was only a bird. But yet Rama performed the final rites to it. Similarly, when Vidhura died, Krishna asked Yudhishtira to perform the funeral rites. So Peria Nambi said that Maraneri Nambi was in no way less than Jatayu or Vidhura as to be not entitled to have his funeral rites performed as per the prescribed procedures. He also added that if Rama and Dharmaputra could do those rites there was no reason why Peria Nambi should hesitate in acting accordingly. He added as to how after reading Nammalwar's Thiruvaimozhi pasurams viz. Payilum sudaroli nedumarkkadimmai" we could still question the fitness of doing samskaram to Maraneri Nambi. Thus, Peria Nambi justified his actions and impressed on Udaiyavar the meaningless caste and community feelings. He also impressed upon him the need for doing kainkaryam i.e. service for the

great devotees. He said after hearing Nammalwar's pasurams, if still we had doubts, about the course of action and did not practice what we read, the knowledge imparted by our teachers would be like kadal osai i.e. futile like the sound of the waves.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I like Peria Nambi have great bakthi towards bagavathars and say that those who did not have such bakthi are not fit to even exist?

70. சுற்றிக் கிடந்தேனோ திருமாலையாண்டான் போலே!

She asks did I like Thirumalai Andan follow Emberumanar closely?

Thirugoshtiyur Nambi asked Udaiyavar to read and understand the inner meaning of Thiruvaimozhi under Thirumalai Andan. But as the classes were progressing, there was difference of opinion with reference to the interpretation of some of the pasurams between Thirumalai andan and Udaiyavar. Thirumalai andan temporarily stopped the classes. Coming to know about this, Thirugoshtiyur Nambi asked the cause from Thirumalai Andan. Andan then said Udaiyavar was giving his own interpretation for some of the pasurams, so he had stopped the classes. Nambi then asked and learnt about the interpretation given by Ramanuja and then confirmed that he had heard his teacher Alavandar give such an interpretation and asked Thirumalai Andan to continue the classes. Again one day Udaiyavar intervened and told Thirumalai Andan that Alavandar had not interpreted it that way. Thirumalai Andan got angry and said you talk as if you have met Alavandar. What is the proof you have that Alavandar did not interpret the pasuram in the manner in which I explain it to you. Emperumanar then said that the relationship between him and Alavandar was the same as that between Dronacharya and Ekalavya. Immediately Thirumalai Andan was reminded of what Thirugoshtiyur Nambi had earlier told him and he bent his head in reverence to Udaiyavar. Later when Emberumanar was giving his interpretations to Thiruvaimozhi, Thirumalai andan used to follow him about everywhere. The role of the teacher and the taught got reversed. He would faithfully, with affection follow Emberumanar, and later

even entrusted his son Sundara Tholudaiyan as a sishya under Emberumanar.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore asks, did I like Thirumalaandan follow Emberumanar about to learn from him the sostras?

71. குளுறவு கொண்டேனோ திருக்கோட்டியூரார் போலே!

She asks, like Thirugoshtiyur Nambi did I get any promise from Ramanuja?

It is believed, that Lord Ranganatha advised Thirugoshtiyur Nambi to take Ramanuja as his student and initiate him in to some of the tenets of vaishnavism. Ramanuja had to visit Thirugoshtiyur 18 times and had to spend one month without any food, before Thirugoshtiyur Nambi accepted him as a student and conveyed to him the Peria Thirumantram. Thirugoshtiyur Nambi had extracted a promise from Ramanuja that he would not pass on the secret to others and that if he did so he would go to hell. But as is well known, the great Ramanuja did not keep up the promise, and was prepared to face hell, while helping others to attain moksha.

The lady of Thirukkolor asks, did I like Thirugoshtiyur Nambi extract any promise and only then impart higher knowledge to other?

72. உயிராய் பெற்றேனோ ஊமையைப் போலே!

She asks, Did I have the fortune like the dumb person to be blessed by Ramanuja?

One day a dumb devotee met Udaiyavar. Udaiyavar took the devotee to a separate room, closed the doors and then blessed the dumb person by keeping his Thiruvadi on the devotee's head. Koorthazhvan saw this incident through the keyhole. He felt very sad. He said: "I should have been born as an ignorant dumb person. Then Ramanuja would have blessed me. Is it because I was born as Koorthazhvan and taken the trouble of

mastering the sastras, that I have been pushed aside and not blessed by Ramanuja? Instead he had only done upadesam of prapathi to me. I have been denied the touch of the holy feet of my acharya”.

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore asked: Did I, like Koort-hazhvan, ever feel that the feet of the Acharya are eternal Raksha for a person? Did I ever have the great fortune like the dumb devotee to receive the Pada Dhooli of my Acharya? The lady of Thirukkolor here once again reiterates the greatness of Acharya Bakthi.

73. உடம்பை வெறுத்தேனோ திருநறையூரரைப் போலே!

She asks, Did I develop a distaste for my body like Tirunara iyurar?

There was a great devotee by name Tirunara iyurar. Every-day he would go to srirangam temple, worship Lord Ranganatha and return to his house. He had a very firm belief in the deity of Srirangam. One day, when he was offering worship to the Moolavar, there was fire in the temple. The people tried to put out the fire, but they failed. They were all running away from the temple to save themselves. Even as the fire was spreading, this devotee Tirunara iyurar, was only worried that his favourite deity may be affected by the fire. He embraced the idol tightly hoping to save it with his body. Seeing Thiruvara iyurar braving the fire, his wife and children hugged him. But the fire destroyed all those devotees.

The lady of Thirukolor therefore asks, “Did I ever have such Bakthi towards Perumal as to offer even my body to safeguard the deity?

74. என்னைப் போல் என்றேனோ உபரிசரனைப் போலே!

She asks, Did I like Uparisaravas, advise others to follow my example?

Uparisaravasu was a king, who was a great devotee of Lord Narayana. One day when Lord Indra was performing a yaga, a doubt arose whether yaga would be fruitful only if a real goat is sacrificed or it would be enough if a symbolic sacrifice with a goat made out of flour, is offered. The Rishis were of the opinion that it is enough if the goat made out of flour is sacrificed, while the Devas felt, that a live goat should be sacrificed. They asked Uparisaravasu to arbitrate. Uparisaravaru was in a dilemma. If he supported the Rishis, the Devas, would curse him; on the other hand, if he supported the Devas, the Rishis would curse him. However he felt that the opinion of the Devas was correct. Immediately the Rishis cursed that he should go to Patala (hell). Uparisaravasu had to go to Hell. The Asuras there tortured him very badly but even then he would not give up his firm belief in Narayana. The cruelties inflicted on him were like water on a duck's back. What is more; once an asura took on the disguise of a Brahman and asked the king to become an atheist, but the king was firm in his belief. Instead he started advising those asuras to give up their bad ways and become Bhakthas like him!

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore, asks: Did I like Uparisaravasu advise anyone to follow my footsteps? Did I try to convert the Nasthikas into Aasthikas?

75. யான் சிறியேனேன்றேனோ திருமலைநம்பியைப்
போலே!

The lady asks, Did I like Thirumalai Nambi say, that I am a person of no consequence?

Once upon a time, Emberumanar went to Thriuvencatam, to worship Lord Srinivasa. Even as he reached half-way up the hill, i.e. near Tirupparivattapparai, Thirumalai nambi who was a great vaishnavite sage himself and was also the uncle of Ramanuja, met Ramanuja at that place. He offered Theertham and other prasadams of Lord Venkatachalapathi to him. Ramanuja prostrated at the feet of Thirumalai Nambi and said: "Swami, did you have to come all the way here just to give the prasadams to me? Could you not have entrusted this work to some other smaller person? Nambi then replied; "Ramanuja, I searched all

the four streets of Tiruvenkatam; I could not find a person lesser in stature than me. Hence it is that I have myself come". Sri Vaishnava Lakshanam is to radiate humility. Hence it is that the great Sri Vaishnavite Baktha, Tirumalainambi said, that there was non lesser to him in stature. In spite of his wisdom, he disclaimed all claim to greatness and without hesitation said "Nan Siriyavan".

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore asks, Am I such a great humble bhaktha?

76. நீரில் குதித்தேனோ கணபுரத்தானைப் போலே!

The lady asks, Did I jump into the waters, like Kannapurathal?

Once Sri Nampillai had been to Thiruvellarai, to worship the Nachiyar. He was returning to Tiruvarangam. Suddenly there was a flash floods in the river Cauveri. To cross the river, he and his followers had to use a sort of small boat known as, Thazhi. As they reached the middle of the river, the boatman suddenly said that that the boat was over-loaded and could not cross, unless the burden was lightened. He said that atleast one or two will have to jump into the river and swim, as otherwise all of them will get drowned. It was mid stream; nobody came forward to sacrifice their lives. But one lady known as Kannapurathal, looked at the boatman and said: "Oh boatman, May you live long. Shri Nampillai is a great scholar and a Baktha. You look after him safely and see that he reaches the other shore". She blessed the boatman and then without hesitation, though it was dark, she jumped into the river. The Thazhi reached the other side safely. Nampillai felt sad, that one lady had sacrificed her life. Even as he was expressing his thought loudly, he heard a voice close-by saying "Swami, I am caught in this bush". Apparently there was this bush somewhere in mid stream. The lady who had jumped out of the Thazhi had been washed on to that bush. She therefore said that she was safe and she had not lost her life. Immediately Nampillai sent the boatman again and had her rescued. She prostrated at the feet of Nampillai and said that Acharya was the only God that she knew. She firmly

believed, that it was the Acharya's kripa, that came as a bush (Korai Puthar) and havd saved her. Nampillai was taken aback by her unquestioning faith in Acharya and said: "Because you had such a firm belief, God has rescued you".

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore, says: Did I like Kan-napurathal, say that, sarvavidha bandhu (father mother and all relations) is the Acharya alone? Did I sacrifice my life and jump into swirling waters, without any hesitation like that great lady? Did I have such a great Acharya Bhakthi?

77. திருகங்கொண்டேனோ காசிசிங்கனைப் போலே!

The lady says, Did I like kasi singan under estimate the dangers of the flowing river?

In Kasi there was a king by name Singan. He was very egoistic. Once he went to the bank of the Ganga river, looked at the people on the shore and said that Ganga held no fears for him, he could swim across Ganga even 10 times and that he was such an expert swimmer, that he can even cross an ocean and that there was none to match him. Having said so, he jumped into the river Ganga. He swam across the river four times. The flow of the water in the river was so powerful, that once he was caught in a whirlpool and was being sucked inside. He was not able to escape. All his attempts proved futile. Immediately he started crying out for help and said "Oh Parandhama!., Anadha Rakshaka! Apatbandhava! Please see to it that I reach the shore". He started reminding God that just as he helped Drowpathi and Gajendra, He should also rush and rescue him. God came to his rescue. From somewhere a big wave came and carried him out of the whirlpool and deposited him on the river bank. The king was very happy.

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore, asks: Did I ever, out of my ego, jump into the Ganga waters, under-estimating the depth of the water? Was I later saved by God's grace when I appealed to him for help?

78. வாக்கினால் வென்றேனோ பட்டரைப்போலே!

The lady says, Did I like Bhattar win any argument with the might of my clever tongue?

Bhattar is the son of Koorthazhvan. Even when he was young, he was very clever. When he was 5 years old, he was playing on the streets. A magician, by name Sarvagna Bhattan came that way, with a haughty gait playing on his musical instrument. He walked like a king. Bhattar saw this and he wanted to test the intelligence of this person. He bent, collected in his hand a fistful of dirt, stood before the magician and said: "Oh! you claim to be all-knowing (sarvagna); Please tell me the quantity of mud that I am holding in my hand. Only if you give the correct answer, will we respect you for your wisdom, and concede your tall claims." The magician was taken aback for a minute. He then laughed. But had no answer. Bhattar then laughed and said: "Oh! how is it that you do not even have the intelligence to say that this is a fist full of dirt. How can you claim that you are a sarvagna? Stop boasting about your greatness. Leave this place and go away". Hearing the small child say this, the magician wanted to know who he was? He asked him, who was his father? He learnt from the people assembled there, that he was the son of Koorthazhvan. He was impressed by the intelligence of this little child. He seated him in his palanquin, went to the house of his father and left him in front of Aalvaar's house. The ladies came rushing out and were worried that Dhrushti i.e. evil eye, might have been cast on this intelligent child. They wondered whether such an intelligent child would live long, as those whom the Gods love die young. Much later, Bhattar became a great Vedanthi and was able to establish the supremacy of Vaishnavism.

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore asked, Did I like Bhattar win anyone through my sharp intellect?"

79. வாயிற் கையிட்டேனோ எம்பாரைப் போலே!

She asks, Did I put my hand inside the serpent's mouth like Embar?

Once Emberumanar was staying with Thirumalai Nambi, for a year, listening to his discourses and lectures on Ramayana.

At that time Embar i.e. Sri Govinda Perumal was also staying with Tirumalai nambi and helped him by rendering various services to him. Ramanuja was very fond of him and was impressed at the way in which he was serving the Acharya. One day he was walking near the Nandhavanam of Thirumalai Nambi. He was Govindaperumal sitting there with his hand lying inside the mouth of a snake. Later he calmly washed his hands and returned to Nambi's house. Seeing this strange sight Emberumanar asked Govinda Perumal, as to what he was doing that morning? He replied, "Swami, I saw a cobra with its tongue hanging out and its mouth kept open. It appeared to me to be in great pain. I therefore inserted my fingers inside its mouth. I discovered that there was a thorn on the inner side of the serpent's tongue; it was apparently causing pain to the serpent. I removed it and returned. Emberumanar was greatly impressed with this love and affection displayed by Govinda Perumal, to a living creature, even though it be a vicious snake.

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore asks, Do I like Govinda Perumal, have apaarakarunai (Bhootha dhayai) (limitless kindness) towards living creatures?

80. தோள் காட்டி வந்தேனோ பட்டரைப் போலே!

She says, Did I like Bhattar indicate the marks on the shoulder?

This refers to an incident in the life history of Bhattar. Once, one of the persons who used to carry the palanquin of Bhattar was on his death-bed. The Yama doothas had come. At the same time, because he had rendered kainkaryam to Bhattar, Vishnu Dootha had also come there, to escort the Atma of that palanquin bearer. Yama Doothas questioned as to why the Narayana Doothas had come there, as it was their duty to take the atma to hell. The Vishnu doothas replied, that in as much as the palanquin bearer rendered yeoman service to Bhattar, a great Vaishnava Bhakta, they were the persons who will be escorting the Atma and that this was the order of Sriman Narayana. Immediately Yama Doothas asked: "If that is the truth, where are the samasraya marks to prove that this

palanquin bearer is a true Vaishnavite (Samasrayam means, a situation when the Vaishnava caste marks, namely Shanku and Chakra are implanted on the shoulder of a devotee) These discussions were heard by the palanquin bearer. He realised that he had no caste marks on his shoulders. He felt sad, that he had served so long and sincerely a great vaishnavite preacher, Bhattar, and yet, he had failed to have the samasrayam done. He sent word to Bhattar and requested him to come and see him. Bhattar came. The palanquin bearer requested Bhattar to do Samasrayam for him before he breathed his last. He felt that if he did not have Samasrayam marks, he would be taken to hell by the Yama Dootha. Bhattar then consoled him and said: "My friend, you need not be worried. There is no time to do Samasrayam now. But you have carried my palanquin for so many years. The scars on your shoulders are proof of the service that you have rendered. There can be no doubt that you are my follower. You will not go to hell. You will definitely attain Moksha".

The lady of Thirukkolor, therefore asks: "Did I, like Bhattar, ever console a person who was lying on his death-bed and convince him that he would attain Moksha"?

81. துறைவேறு செய்தேனோ பகவரைப் போலே!

The lady says, Did I like the sanyasi have a separate place on the river front for offering prayers.?

There lived a person by name Villiputhur Bagavar. He was staying in Thiruvaheendrapuram, near Cuddalore. When all the Rishis and Swamis would bathe in a particular ghat, he would not do his anushtanam and prayers at that spot, but had selected a separate spot on the river bank. One day seeing him return after performing his prayers at the separate spot, the Brahman asked him "Swamy, while all of us are having our bath and offering prayers at this spot, why is it you are performing your prayers at a separate spot?" Why have you selected that spot? Villiputhur Bagavar then replied: "You are following dharma sastra principles. I am following Alvars and the other Poorvacharyas. I am a Bhagavatha Follower i.e. the devotee's

devotee (Adiyane Adiyane) I only follow God's devotees. I am daasaanudaasan. Hence, I am not coming to your part of the river.

The lady of Thirukkolor therefore says, Did I like Viliputhur Bagavar, enunciate the great Vaishnavite philosophy, that Bhagavatha Sambandam is greater than Bhagavath Sambandam?

Thus the great lady of Thirukkolor hurled 81 questions at Ramanuja. She said that she did not have the depth of knowledge and depth of Bhakthi like the many personalities mentioned earlier by her. In all humility, she therefore said that it was immaterial where such an ignorant person like her stayed. She requested Ramanuja to come to Thirukkolor and stay there and do Mangala Sasanam (sing the praise of God) to Vaitha Maanidhi Perumal and assured him that if only Ramanuja would come to Thirukkolor, it would ensure that worship is offered to Vaitha Manidhi Perumal without any shortcomings. Emberumanar was impressed with this lady's humility and the depth of her knowledge. He went to Thirukkolor, stayed in her house, had his meals there and blessed her by offering Sreepadha Theertham to her.

Vanamamalai Jeeyar said that this Thirukkolor Penn Pillai Rahasyam was related to him by his acharya Manavala Mamuni who heard it from his acharya Thiru Vaimozhi Pillai.

Epigraphical Highlights :

On a slab built into the southern flight of steps leading into the hall in front of the main shrine of Vaittamaanidhi Perumal temple there is a record which relates to the Pandyan period. It records a gift of 50 sheep for lighting a perpetual lamp to the God. The sheep were entrusted to two persons described as Padaittalaivar to undertake to supply ghee daily to the temple.¹

Another inscription on a slab built into the flight of steps leading to the kitchen relates to the period of Rajaraja I the chola

¹ Ins. No. 349 of ARIE 1960-61 Appendix-B

king. It records a similar donation to the God by a merchant. 25 sheep were entrusted in this case to one person and another 25 to another person each of whom agreed to supply certain quantity of ghee daily for lighting the lamp.²

Yet another inscription found on the tiers of the southern wall of the central shrine of this temple records an endowment of a sandhya dheepam to the Perumal. The gift was taken over by the temple authorities who agreed to honour the wishes of the donor. This incscription related to the period of Pandyan King Jatavarman Kulasekhara.³

The other inscription found on the same tier of the same wall of the central shrine records similar gifts by a resident to the temple.⁴

Yet another inscription relating to the period of Kulottunga I the Chola king records the confirmation of the tax free enjoyment of two velis of land in Vummudicholavilagam. This was said to have been necessitated as the original gift deed which was on palm leaf was eaten by white ants.⁵

Yet another inscription found on the base of the platform around the central shrine records the gift of 50 sheep for lighting aperpetual lamp to God.⁶

Another inscription relating to the priod of the Chola King Jatavarman Chola Pandya records a donation of various kasu to several individuals for the Sandhya Dheepam to the God.⁷

Another fragment in the same place refers to similar contributions made by a woman for the same purpose.⁸

² Ins. No. 350 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

³ Ins. No. 445 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

⁴ Ins. No. 447 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

⁵ Ins. No. 449 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

⁶ Ins. No. 451 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

⁷ Ins. No. 452 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

⁸ Ins. No. 453 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

Another inscription relating to the period of the same Chola king records a gift of land for four perpetual lamps to the God.⁹

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the central shrine of this temple relates to the period of the Pandya King Maravarman Sundarapandyan II. It records the king's order revising the taxes and dues payable on the lands in two villages after re-surveying them as the said lands were said to have been remained untilled due to the excessive taxes levied previously.¹⁰

On the western wall of the same shrine there is yet another inscription relating to the period of Maravarman Sundarapandya I which records a royal order making certain lands as tax free deva dhana as the lands were offered to the Perumal for conducting festival in the temple in the month of Panguni.¹¹

Yet another inscription on the mandapa in front of the central shrine in this temple relates to the period of Udaya-marthandavarman ruler of Travancore. It records an order of the God while seated in the pavillion called, Madurakavi pandal, granting certain lands belonging to the temple as Kaniyatchi, to one Marthandam a Kaikkola.¹²

Another inscription records the order of the deity to allot a share in the prasadam offered in the temple to Nainal, the daughter of Azhagia Nambi¹³

Yet another order of the deity is registered in an inscription. This refers to some lands the lease rights of which were purchased from the Sri Vaikuntam sabha.¹⁴

Another inscription on the mandapa in front of the central shrine of this temple records the gift of a perpetual lamp weighing 50 palam and some money for its maintenance to the God at

⁹ Ins. No. 456 of ARIE 1961-62 Appendix-B

¹⁰ Ins. No. 715 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹¹ Ins. No. 717 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹² Ins. No. 720 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹³ Ins. No. 721 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹⁴ Ins. No. 722 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

Thirukkolor. The amount was made over to two brahmanas who undertook to contribute oil for the lamp ¹⁵

Another inscription records gift of certain land which were made tax free. ¹⁶

Another inscription found on the mandapa in front of the central shrine on the eastern wall relating to the period of Tirunelveli Perumal, the Pandya king. It records an order of the deity in respect of the distribution of the prasadams to Pandi Perumal out of the food offerings during Sri bali in the mid-day sandhi, called Vira Pandya sandhi. This Pandi Perumal apparently endowed some lands to the temple. ¹⁷

Hymnology:

Nammalvar has sung 12 pasurams inpraise of the Lord here. One pasuram along with its meaning is given below.

Thiruvaimozhi (6-7-1) :

உண்ணும் சோறுப ருகுநீர் தின்னும் வெற்றி லையு-
மெல்லாம்

கண்ணன் எம்பெரு மாளெனிறன் நேகண்கள் நீர் மல்கி
மண்ணி னுள்அவன் சேவளம் மிக்கவ னூர் விளவி
திண்ணம் என்இள மான்புகு மூர்திற்க கோளுரே!

Meaning :

My daughter with her doe like eyes filled with unshed tears of joy, repeats many times that the food that one eats, the water that one drinks and the betel leaf that one chews, are all kannan and Perumal.

She enquires, as to which is the divya desam in this world where that glorious perumal resides and finally with unhesitating and a sure manner, she enters Thirukkolor.

¹⁵ Ins. No. 723 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹⁶ Ins. No. 724 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B

¹⁷ Ins. No. 725 of ARIE 1962-63 Appendix-B



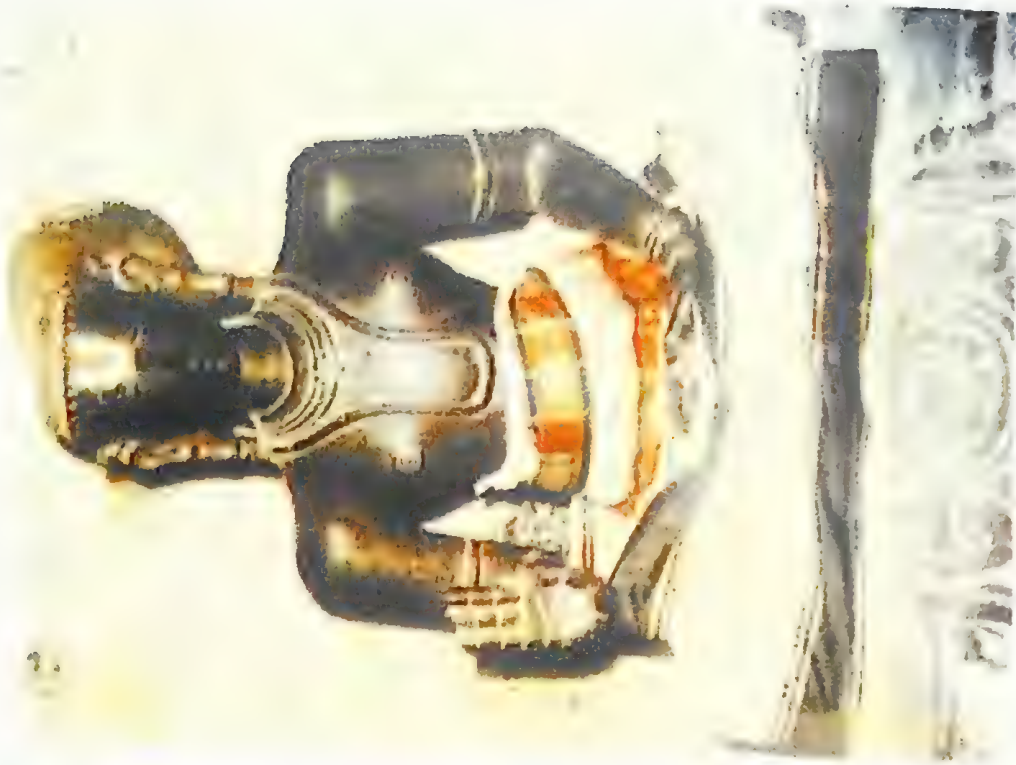
Photo of Thirukkolor Utsavamoorthi



A View of Thirukkolor Utsavamurthy



Nammalwar Utsavamoothi



Nammalwar Moolavar

Note: It is said that Nammalvar is the only Alvar who was able to fully understand the all encompassing nature of God. That is why he says that God is the food that one eats, the water that one drinks, the air that one breathes. The true devotee sees God in every atom.

**Divyakavi Pillaiperumal Iyengars's
108 Tirupati Andhaadi:**

பிறப்பு அற்று, முப்புப பிணி அற்று, நானும்
இறப்பு அற்று, வாழ இருப்பீர்! புறப்பற்றுத்
தள்ளுங்கோள்; ஊர் அரவில் தாமோதரன் பள்ளி
கொள்ளும் கோளூர் மருவுங்கோள்

Meaning :

If you desire to avoid the pain of this eternal cycle of births, deaths and rebirth and be relieved from the ills, like disease and old age and attain moksha, then go to Thirukkolor, where Damodara is seen lying down on Adisesha.

Note: Pillai Iyengar says, surrender and that too, offer abject unconditional surrender, at the lotus feet of Perumal. He will bless you with salvation.

ALWAR THIRUNAGARI

Alwar Thirunagari is one of a cluster of Nine Vaishnavite divya desams known as Nava Tirupathis. Originally, this place was known as Thiru Nagari as also Kurugoor. Subsequently, the place became more famous as Nammalwar the vaishnavite savant attained salvation in this place. The place itself thus got the name Alwar Thirunagari.

Five miles in and around Kurugoor is popularly known as Thiruvazhuthivala Nadu. The forefathers of Nammalwar were the chieftains of this place and ruled over this area. In this area, there are six big towns with nine vaishnavite temples. The nine vaishnavite temples are known as Nava Tirupathis.

1. Adinathar koil at Thirukurugoor
2. Kaisina Vendar koil at Thirupulingudi
3. Vijayasanar koil at Varagunamangai
4. Kallapiran koil at Sri Vaikuntam
5. Mayakoothan koil at Perungulam also known as Kulandai
6. Makara Nedunkuzhai Kathan koil at Thirupperai
7. Devapiran koil at Tholaivilli Mangalam
8. Aravindalochana koil at Tholaivilli mangalam
9. Vaitha Maanidhi Perumal koil at Thirukkolur.

As these Nava Tirupathis form 50% of the vaishnavite divya desams in Pandya Nadu, it is appropriate that before giving the details relating to each of these divya desams certain general information pertaining to these nine divya desams are first related. It may be recalled that while dealing with the divya desams in Chola Nadu, there were eleven Tirupathis or divya desams which are always referred to as one unit viz. The Thirunangoor Divya desams. The details of the Eleven Garuda Sevai festival celebrated in common for those eleven Tirupathis was given. It was stated there that the precedent for that Eleven Garuda Sevai was the Garuda Sevai festival celebrated in Alwar Thirunagari associating the Perumals of all the Nava Tirupathis.

The original model was therefore the Nava Tirupathi Garuda Sevai at Alwar Thirunagari. Let us therefore first mention the broad details of this unique Garuda Seva.

In the month of Vaikasi, on the fifth day when the Visaka star is in the ascendant, this Garuda Sevai is celebrated at Alwar Thirunagari. It attracts huge crowds. It is believed that as Nammalwar stayed and attained moksha at Alwar Thirunagari and his idol was duly installed by his equally great disciple, Madurakavi at Alwar Thirunagari and as Nammalwar is regarded as the foremost amongst the Alwars, the Perumals of Nava Tirupathis come to Alwar Thirunagari once a year to have darshan of Nammalwar. This Nava Tirupathi Garuda Sevai was a practice started in 1807 by Pandala Ramasamy Nayakar. He constructed a special mandapam for this which is even today known as Pandal mandapam. This is next to the Rajagopuram. The Nava Tirupati Perumals seated on Garuda vahanam are brought to Alwar Thirunagari. Nammalwar is placed on a decorated hamsa vahanam. Madurakavi Alwar is placed on a pirangi narkal i.e. (chair). The festival is celebrated in such a manner that one by one the Perumals of the Nava Tirupathis are brought before Nammalwar and the pasuram of Nammalwar in praise of the said Nava Tirupathi Perumal is rendered. During the festival the Perumals offer their tulasi garland and the satari as their offering to the idol of Nammalwar, which as stated earlier, is seated on a hamsa vahana. After all the functions are over when the Perumals of the Nava Tirupathis have to go back to their respective places the function is organised in such a manner as if the Gods take leave of Nammalwar and the hamsa vahanam on which Nammalwar is seated is placed in a manner so as to enable him to have a last look at the receding figures of the various Perumals. Only after it is impossible for the human eyes to see the receding figures is the palanquin of Nammalwar taken back into the Adinatha Perumal koil! The entire festival is symbolic of, as well as steeped in, religious fervour and faith that it is said to leave the participants with a feeling of ecstasy.

In the Thirunangoor eleven Garuda Sevai Thirumangai Alwar goes from one divya desam to another singing the praise of the Perumal at each place. Later the Perumals and Alwar

congregate on the banks of Manikarnikai channel. But in Alwar Thirunagari Garuda Seva, Nammalwar remains put at Alwar Thirunagari but the Perumals from the other eight divya desams come to Alwar Thirunagari to have a darsan of Nammalwar. This is the main difference.

Except in Alwar Thirunagari, in the other eight Tirupathis there is no idol for Nammalwar. The vigraha of Nammalwar installed at Alwar Thirunagari is a bronze image which is a "Thaanaaga uganda meni" i.e. it is not a sculpted vigraha but an idol which emerged on its own. When Nammalwar gave up his mortal coils and was being taken to Vaikuntam by Perumal, Madurakavi Alwar was very sad. He requested Nammalwar to take him along with him to Vaikunta. But Perumal as well as Nammalwar impressed upon Madurakavi Alwar that his job in the world was not yet completed and at the due time, he would be conferred moksha. In the meantime to give him satisfaction Nammalwar instructed him to go to Tambaraparani river, collect water from there and boil it. He assured him that his image would emerge out of it. Accordingly, Madurakavi Alwar went to Tambaraparani river, collected the water and boiled it. But the image that came out of it first had no resemblance to Nammalwar and it left Madurakavi alwar nonplussed. Madurakavi Alwar realised that the idol which came out was that of Ramanuja who would be playing a great role in propogating the basic tenets of Vaishnavism. Madurakavi therefore repeated the experiment and the second time when the water of Tambaraparani river was boiled, the image of Nammalwar emerged. It is this bronze image which is seen today at Alwar Thirunagari. As Nammalwar shed his mortal coils even before he was forty years of age, the image itself truly reflects the features of a person who is in the prime of his youth. The image is presented with an elaborate coiffeur i.e. hair arrangement. He is seen in a padmasana pose, with the left hand placed on his lap and the right hand in a vyakyana mudra with forefinger and thumb joined together. Thirumanjanam is performed to the idol of Nammalwar also. One strange feature is that from Aippasi to Masi i.e. from October to March the idol of Nammalwar has its Thirumanjanam only with hot water! This is a unique practice in vogue in this temple.

The Acharya Hridayam says that in each of these Nava Tirupathis one quality of Perumal is highlighted. In Alwar Thirunagari (also known as Thiru Kurugoor) the paratvam of God is the main characteristic. In Tholai villi mangalam, the banduttvan of God is highlighted. In Thirukkolor the quality of God every ready and eager to rush to the rescue of His sincere devotees is highlighted. In Thenthiruperaï the enchanting beauty of the Lord which captivates, subjugates and overwhelms the devotees is the focal point. In Thirukulandai we see God's ability to perform miracles and unusual feats. In Thirupulingudi, Varagunamangai and in Sri Vaikuntam, we see the all encompassing quality of God's love. These various qualities of the Perumal in each divya desams are also reflected through the mangalasasana pasurams sung by Nammalwar.

The Nava Tirupathis are famous as the Navagraha kshetrams. People suffering due to the malefic influence of any one of these Navagrahas could get alleviated by visiting the specific Navatirupathi which represents that navagraha and by propitiating that graha. The Tirupathis and the navagrahas they represent are as follows:-

Suryan (Sun)	Perumal at Varagunamangai
Chandran (Moon)	Perumal at Thirupulingudi
Sevvai (Mars)	Perumal at Thirukulandai
Budhan (Mercury)	Perumal at Alwar Thirunagari
Vyazhan (Jupiter)	Perumal at Thirukkolor
Sukran (Venus)	Perumal at Sri Vaikuntam
Sani (Saturn)	Perumal at Thenthiruperaï.
Rahu (Rahu)	Perumal at Tholai villi mangalam (Aravindalochanan)
Kethu (Kethu)	Perumal at Tholai villi mangalam (Devapiran)

To now relate the sthala purana of Alwar Thirunageri. This place is on the banks of the river Tambaraparani. It is located on the Tirunelveli- Tiruchendur Railway line. It is about 3 miles from Srivaikuntam, 20 miles from Tirunelveli and 17 miles to the west of Thiruchendur. This place is known severally as Kurugoor, Adi kshetram, Dantha kshetram, Varaha kshetram and Sesha kshetram and Sangar kshetram. It is therefore known

as Pancha Kshetram. The story behind its name will be narrated in the following paras.

The moolavar here is known as Adinatha Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Thayar is known as Adinatha valli. The theerthams are two viz. Brahma theertham and Tambaraparani river. The sthala viruksham is the tamarind tree - the famous tamarind tree in which Nammalwar sat for sixteen long years and meditated. A peculiar feature of this tamarind tree is that the leaves of the tree never fold even in the night. It is therefore known as "Uranga puli maram" i.e. a tamarind tree which does not sleep by day or night. It has seven branches. It is thousands of years old. It is full of hollows. The bark of the tree is said to possess medicinal properties. Some say that this tamarind tree is the amsam of Adhishesha and Lakshmana. The Vimanam is known as Govinda vimanam. God appeared to Brahma, Madurakavi Alwar, Nammalwar, Danthan and Sangamuni.

ADI KSHETRAM

Once upon a time Lord Brahma prayed to Lord Vishnu and requested that God should manifest himself in archa forms in a number of places so as to enable His devotees the rishis and other to easily have His darshan. God then directed Brahma to go to a place which is on the southern banks of Tambaraparani river and pray to Adinatha perumal. He said that even before He had created Brahma, He was captivated by the scenic beauty of the place on the southern tip of Bharatha kanda. He said He had stayed there for a long time. As this was the place which was there inexistence even before Brahma created the world and as this was the place which had first captivated Perumal even in Adikalam, it is known as Adi kshetram. God assured Brahma that in due course He would reincarnate and appear before His devotees at Adi kshetram.

As Perumal appeared before Brahma and related to him this story about the time prior to even creation and as He acted as a guru i.e. teacher to Brahma and advised him to go to this place, the place came to be known as Guroor i.e. the place referred to by the great teacher.

There are others who say that Kurugoor was once upon a time ruled by the forefathers of Nammalwar known as Thiruvazhudhi Valanatans. One of the chieftains who ruled this place was one Kurugan. Hence the place was referred to as Kurugan puri i.e. Kuruga puri.

Kurugu has various meanings. It refers to a hen, a conch and coir. As this place is famous for its conches, it got the name Kurugu (Shankhu) puri which in due course became Kurugoor.

DANTHA KSHETRAM

The place came to be known as Dantha kshetram as here the devotee Danthan attained moksha. In Salagrama mountain, a person by name Mandan was learning the vedas. He was slow on the uptake and was not able to utter the words clearly. The teacher got annoyed and cursed that in the next birth, he be born as a melecha i.e. a member belonging to a low caste. Mandan was however not upset with this curse. He decided to spend the rest of his life in the Vishnu Mandir nearby cutting the grass and selling it to the cowherds. God was impressed with this simple uncomplicated life led by Danthan. In due course, Mandan died. In the next birth, he was born as a Sudra known as Danthan. One day while Danthan was sleeping, he had a dream urging him to proceed on a pilgrimage in the southern direction and to have his bath in the Porunai river, then reach Kurugoor and worship Adipiran Perumal at Kurugoor. Danthan followed the instructions and reached Kurugoor.

At that very time, in the Heavens, there was a fight between the devas and the asuras. Indra and the devas approached Brahma. Brahma advised them to go to Kurugoor and worship Adipiran. Accordingly, they also reached Kurugoor, went to Nandavanam, to collect flowers to worship Adipiran. Danthan was also at the same place collecting flowers for his pooja to the same Perumal. As Danthan belonged to a low caste the Devas slighted him. Danthan was not affected by this insult. On the other hand, it was the devas who lost their eye sight. They wondered at this turn in their fortunes. At that time, an asareeri voice was heard addressing the devas. It chided the devas for their shameful behaviour in needlessly humiliating a Vishnu

baktha. It asserted that the ill-treatment on an innocent Vishnu baktha had invited this handicap on the devas! The Devas were advised to go and fall at the feet of the true devotee Danthan and that he alone could release them from their plight. The devas felt ashamed. They fell at the feet of Danthan. Danthan prayed to Adi Perumal and with His blessings, the devas regained their eye sight. Adinatha Perumal blessed the devas and assured them that their prayers to defeat the asuras will be fulfilled. On seeing Adinatha, Danthan requested for moksha. Adipiran passed His hands over the body of Danthan. At that instant petals were showered from the Heavens. Danthan was carried in a divine vehicle to Paraloka. This is the story which explains as to why Kurugoor is known as Dantha Kshetram.

This story is depicted through a painting in the Jaya Vijaya Gopura Vasal i.e. entrance at Alwar Thirunagari.

THEERTHA KSHETRAM (SANGHA KSHETRAM)

Once upon a time, in Sanghu Teevu on the banks of Sangha nadhi a rishi by name Sangan was in deep meditation. The devas were worried at the severity of his penance and wondered as to what was the wish and the desire to attain which he was performing such a severe penance. At that time, Narada who was passing by assured the devas that they had nothing to worry. He told them that Sanga muni was a hunter in his earlier birth. He was very cruel and regarded killing as his sport. One day, he felt tired and lay down under a banayan tree. Unknown to him, he had chosen a holy spot to lie down. That was the place where Danthan, the devotee used to sit and worship the Lord. Thus, the dust on which the hunter lay down was earlier sanctified by the feet of a Vishnu baktha viz. Danthan. This accidental contact with the holy dust of the feet of the devotee enabled the hunter to be born as a rishi in his next birth. Narada continued that yet the sins of his earlier birth continued to blind his vision and he was not able to realise that Narayan is the supreme God. Narada went to the asram of Sanga Muni. The muni welcomed Narada. Narada asked the muni as to who was the God whom he was worshipping. Sanga muni replied that all gods were equal. This annoyed Narada. He cursed Sanga muni to be born as a conch in the Lavana samudram in the south. The muni was

perturbed. He fell at the feet of Narada and sought forgiveness. Narada advised him to have implicit faith only in Narayana and worship him at Adipuri. As a result of the curse the muni became a valampuri conch. The conch floated along the waterways and reached Adipuri. It remembered the assurance given by Narada that during Kaliyuga, Narayana will appear at Adipuri. The conch used to spend its day time floating along the river bank and going into the temple and worshipping Adinatha Perumal. The night would be spent in the ocean. In course of time god was pleased with the sincere worship of Sangan. He appeared before Sangan and other conches and gave them moksha. God also assured that henceforth that Tambaraparani river would become famous as Sankha theertham. This accounts for the name Sanganithurai near Kurugoor.

This story is also depicted in the form of a painting in Alwar Thirunagari temple.

VARAHA KSHETRAM

It is said that the sthala purana of this place was told by Vasishta Mahamuni to many of the rishis assembled at Thirukkurugoor. One day, Perumal appeared before these rishis as Adivaraha Perumal with Bhoomidevi seated on His lap. Perumal then told them that in the days of yore i.e. before creation (adikalam) He resided in that very same place in His varaha avataram and did gnanopadesam to Bhoomidevi. He assured the rishis that if they continue to stay there and worship Him, they would be blessed with enlightenment. As God appeared in His Varaha avataram in this place, Kurugoor is also known as Varaha kshetram.

It is a well known story that Perumal appeared as Varaha avatar only to rescue, Bhoomi devi who had been abducted and kept a prisoner deep down in the ocean by Hiranya Kasipu. Even after the rescue, Bhoomidevi was looking forlorn and sad. God asked for the reason and Bhoomidevi told God that she was feeling bad as though She was fortunate enough to be rescued by God, very many other human beings who suffer like her at the hands of the asuras could not expect to be rescued by God. God then told the Kaisika charama slokam to Bhoomidevi. There are

three charama slokams - one in Ramayanam when Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana approached Rama for saranam. Vali, Sugreeva and the other monkey kings were doubtful about the intentions of Vibhishana. Rama then consulted one by one all the others. Hanuman then told Rama that irrespective of the background of the person any person who approaches one and seeks security and saranagathi should automatically be given saranam. Rama said that He agreed with the view of Hanuman and then the charama slokam was uttered by Rama at that time. In that Charama slokam Rama highlighted the fact that whoever seeks saranagathi at the feet of the Lord will be given protection. The second occasion when the charama slokam was uttered was in the battle field during the MahaBharatha war when Arjuna struck by remorse momentarily refused to fight with his own relatives, the Kauravas who were all standing in the rathams on the opposite side. At that time Krishna advised Arjuna to forget about the relationship and to believe only in Perumal. Krishna took on the viswaroopa form and impressed upon Arjuna that He was the only and ultimate truth. He asked him to do his job and leave it to Him to establish dharma. Here also the charama slokam is somewhat conditional in that it expects the devotee to do his part of the job and only then Prumal will come to his rescue. In the Kaisika mahatyam, however, Varaha Nayanar uttered the charama slokam to Bhoomidevi as per which the only thing expected of a devotee is to think of the Perumal and the Perumal would, without fail, rush to the rescue of the devotee. Perumal told Bhoomi devi that the people who were born in this world should think of God atleast towards the end of their life. Bhoomi devi then raised a doubt whether it is possible for the people who have reached the end of their lives and may be suffering from diseases of mind and body and when perhaps they are sans eyes, sans ears and sans everything they will remember to think of God. God conceded even that point of Thayar and said when the persons who are in the prime of their life atleast once if they think of God, when they are helpless and at the end of their tether, even if they do not think of Narayana, He would without fail come to their rescue and personally guide them to paramapadam. Hence it is that in the religious scriptures the charama slokam uttered by Varaha Nayanar to Bhoomi devi is considered to be the best as

Perumal promises salvation to the devotees even if they think of God atleast once in the course of their life.

OTHER STORIES

Once upon a time, an elephant and a hunter had a fierce fight at Kurugoor. In the course of the fight both the hunter and the elephant died. The envoys of Vishnu (Vishnu doothas) came to guide the souls of the hunter and the elephant to Vishnu loka. The rishis who watched this wondered as to why the Vishnu doothas had come. Meantime, the Indra doothas as well as the Yama doothas also appeared at the place. The Yama doothas said that the elephant in its previous birth as a human being had committed numerous sins and hence it was cursed to be born as an animal in its next birth. They said that to atone for the balance of the sins, the elephant had to undergo many more births. Similarly, the hunter was in his previous birth a person who killed for the pleasure of killing. The Yama doothas therefore justified that both the souls should atone for the balance of their sins in hell. While this was so, the Indra doothas said as both of them had put up a fierce and valiant fight and had embraced death in due course of a heroic battle, they were entitled to go to veera swarga i.e. heaven of the warriors; But meantime, the Vishnu doothas guided the souls to Vishnu loka. The doubt in the minds of the rishis as well as the Yama doothas and the Indra doothas was satisfied by an asareeri voice which explained this apparently inexplicable event. The asareeri said that the place where the hunter and the elephant had breathed their last was a holy place. It was a favourite haunt of Lord Narayana. Hence whoever had the fortune of drawing his last breath in this place viz. Kurugoor Adikshetram was assured of moksha without any questions about the past sins being raised; Such is the greatness of Kurugoor.

Yet another story relates to an incident in the life of Indra. Once upon a time, Lord Indra along with his wife was in an intoxicated state having imbibed more than his share of drinks. At that time his parents Kasyapa rishi and Athithi came. The inebriated Indra failed to observe the usual respectful courtesies extended to ones parents. Kasyapa and Adithi got annoyed. Kasyapa cursed that Indra should loose his youth and wealth.

Immediately, Indra became old and aged. He started trembling with fear. He fell at the feet of his father and sought forgiveness. Athithi also pleaded on behalf of Indra. Kasyapa said that a curse once uttered could not be recalled. He however advised Indra to go to Kurugoor on the banks of the Tambaraparani river and worship Adinatha Perumal. He would set right the matters and bless him. Indra accordingly went to Kurugoor and worshipped Perumal. He had his bath in Thiru sangani thurai. In due course, Adinatha Perumal appeared, touched Indra with His hands. Immediately, Indra regained his youth as well as his wealth. This story was related by Vyasa rishi to other rishis to impress upon them the holiness of this place.

Another interesting story associated with this place related to the origin of the Holy Tamarind tree. It is said that Rama installed Vibhishana at Lanka, returned to Ayodhya and ruled the kingdom for a long time. In the meantime, in deference to the public opinion he had sent Sita devi to the forest even as she was expecting the babies. One day Yama came to Ayodhya to discuss with Rama. Rama then directed Lakshmana to guard his palace and not to allow anybody inside. Lakshmana was doing that job, when, Durvas muni came. Lakshmana was afraid of Durvasa's notorious temper. He allowed Durvasa to enter. Rama received the rishi. But he was angry with Lakshmana for having disobeyed his orders. Meantime, Lakshmana also developed cold feet for not having observed Rama's instructions. He left the place and went to the banks of the Sarayu river. When Durvasa left, Rama searched for Lakshmana. Meantime, Rama had abdicated his throne and enthroned Kusa and Lava. He also reached the banks of Sarayu river. There he saw Lakshmana who stood like a statue before him. Rama upbraided him for disobeying his orders. He cursed that Lakshmana who stood like a statue now would in his next birth, be an immoveable object. Lakshmana fell at the feet of his brother and sought forgiveness. Rama expressed his inability to withdraw the curse. However he comforted Lakshmana by telling him that he himself had sinned by sending innocent Sita to the forest and that to atone for that sin, he would be born as a brahmachari in the next birth. He told Lakshmana at that time, He would reside with Lakshmana who would be born as an inanimate object. He advised Lakshmana

to go to the southern banks of Porunai river and reach Varaha kshetram. He gave him a ring and said that the place where the ring slips out of his finger would be place where he would become a tamarind tree. Rama also said that Kasyapa muni would be born as Kari. Athithi, the wife of Kasyapa will be born as Udaiya Nangai and that to Kari and Udaiya Nangai will be born a child who would, on the 12th day, sit in one of the hollows of the tamarind tree. He said that this event would occur in the early days of Kaliyuga and that at that time the Tamil vedas will be gifted to the world. Thus consoled Lakshmana went to Tambaraparani river. It is believed that the tamarind tree which is seen today in the Alwar Thirunagari temple is the incarnation of Lakshmana. It has got seven branches. Nammalwar stayed for sixteen years meditating in the hollows of this tree. As Rama (i.e. Nammalwar) was to meditate under the shade of this tree as a brahmachari, He would have the thayar Sita devi as a Vakula mala (makizha malai) garland of flowers round His neck all the time. This explains why Nammalwar who meditated under this tree always had a vakula mala round his neck and earned the name Vakulabarana Satagopan.

Ramanuja, the great vaishnavite seer was so inspired by this legendary hoary tree that he burst into poetry on seeing it. Ramanuja wanted to visit the birth place of his master Nammalwar situated about 450 miles from Sriperumbudur. In those days, 450 miles was a great distance to cover with ease. But undaunted Ramanuja set off on the arduous journey motivated by the compelling sentiment to see his master's birth place. After many months, Ramanuja reached Alwar Thirunagari. Enroute at one place, he enquired from the villagers the way to the Thirunagari village. The villagers told him that after crossing three villages, he would come across a big tamarind tree, with a huge hollow in its trunk where the boy Nammalwar sat and meditated. He was told that river Porunai would be flowing in a meandering way nearby, and from the tree he could see the Thirunagari village. Ramanuja faithfully followed the instructions and when he reached the tree and saw the hollow his joy knew no bounds. He burst forth into the following verse.

Idhuvo Thirunagari?

Idhuvo Porunai?

Idhuvo Parampadathu

ellai - Iduvothan

Vedam pagarnthitta meiporulin ut Porulai

Odhum Satagopan Oor?

Freely translated it reads as:-

Oh is this Thirunagari?

Is this the great Porunai river?

Is this the boundary of Paramapadam? Is this the birth-place of Satagopan

Who gave us the quintessence of the vedas and helped in spreading the truth ensconced in the great books?

It is a popular belief here that in Alwar Thirunagari the feet of the moolavar viz. Adinatha Perumal who is seen in a standing posture is not clearly visible. It was held that the feet would emerge out of the earth in full only when the Kaliyuga comes to an end. But unfortunately this story does not seem to be very true as recently when in connection with the Maha kumbabishekham the moolavar idol was given a thorough refurbishing, the feet of the Lord could be seen on the lotus base. Of course, the feet are not very clearly visible as in other temples. May be when Kaliyuga ends, the feet will emerge in full. Let us therefore cling on to the story and the divine feet!

SIDDHAR STORY

Once upon a time there lived a yogi (hermit) on the northern bank of Tambaraparani river. Nammalwar was seated on the southern bank. The yogi had a dog which would every day cross the river to the southern side, roam through the streets of Alwar Thirunagari and satisfy its hunger by eating the food left over in the leaves from which the Sri vaishnavites had their meals. One day, however, the dog did not return at the usual time. The yogi got worried. He walked down to the river bank. He saw that the dog had left the southern bank, but half way thro' apparently a flash flood had occurred, the dog unable to

swim against the current had drowned. The yogi however observed that when the dog died, its head burst and a shining light emanated and rose heavenwards. This made the yogi wonder whether when a dog could ascend to heaven merely by virtue of its eating the food left on the leaves by the pious vaishnavites in the holy streets of holy kurugoor, why he also could not attain salvation like that dog? This Siddhar story is perhaps the origin and inspiration for the following lines composed by Kambar in his Satagopar Anthadhi-17.

நாய் போற்பிறர் கடைதோறு நுழைந்தவரெச்சினச்சிப்
 பேய் போற்றியும் பிறவியி னேனைப் பிறவியெறு
 நோய் போமருந்தென்று றுன்றிருவாய் மொழி நோக்கு
 வித்தித்
 நாய் போறுதவி செய்தாய்க் கடியேன் பண்டென்
 சாதித்ததே.

This incident of the dog attaining moksha is sculpted in a stone on the banks of Tambaraparani river near Alwar theerthavari mandapam.

THE STORY OF NAMMALWAR:-

The story of Thirunagari (Kurugoor) is so intertwined with the life history of Nammalwar that the story of Kurugoor is not complete without relating the life history of Nammalwar.

The name Nammalwar converys very many meanings. Nam Alwar in Tamil means our own saint. This is said to have been a title given by Lord Ranganatha to this saint as stated in Kambar's Satagopar Andadhi (3). Nammalwar was so called because of his conquest of the Satha-Bayu or the conquest of the materialistic attractions of the world atmosphere which stands in the way of the spiritual vision of the soul. Another name for the saint is Maran. It means He who is different i.e. against the ways of this world which stands in the way of the spiritual vision of the soul. He is also known as Parankusa, meaning one who has control over the elements even as an elephant is controlled by ankus. He is also known as Vakulabaràna. It is believed that Nammalwar is Rama himself who had come

into this world without Sita Devi. He therefore promised Her that He would be wearing the garland made of vakula flowers which are said to represent Devi herself. Nammalwar who was always wearing the vakula mala was therefore known as Vakulabaranan. Nammalwar was born in the Kaliyuga just 43 days after Lord Krishna retired from the world i.e. at the end of Dwapara yugam. The Bavishyath purana prophesied that in the beginning of Kali yuga on the day when full moon is in conjunction with the constellation Visaka, Visvakshenar who is the commander-in-chief of Vishnu will himself incarnate as Nammalwar in order to revive faith in Vishnu. Brahmanda puranam also refers to this when it says that in the Pandya desam in the town called Srinagari i.e. Thirunagari on the banks of the river Tambaraparani will be born a saint known as Nammalwar. The geneological table detailing the ancestors of Nammalwar is as follows:-

1. Thiruvazjudi Valanadar (king of Kurugu nadu with Thirunagari as the capital)
2. Dharmavarma
3. Chakrapaniyar
4. Achutar
5. Senthamarai Kannar
6. Senkannar
7. Porkariyar
8. Kariyar
9. Nammalwar.

Porkariyar got his son Kariyar married to the daughter of Thiruvazhmarbar, the great vaishnavite of Thiruvanparisaram, a place close to Kurugoor. Thiruvazhmarbar's daughter was Udaiyar Nangaiyar. After the marriage, Kariyar and Udaiyanangaiyar visited Thirukurungudi and prayed to Lord Nambi for an issue. God promised to fulfill their wish. Kariyar and his wife returned to Kurugoor or Srinagari. Meantime, Narayana i.e. Thirukurungudi Perumal Nambi had commanded His chieftain Visvakshenar to go down to earth and be born as the son of Kariyar. Adishesha, the divine couch of Narayana was born in the form of a tamarind tree which was to be the holy tree under

which Nammalwar would meditate. At the same time, Madurakavi was born in a brahmin family at Thirukkolor. He is believed to be the amsam of Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda. Thus the mosaic of God's intentions was falling into the predetermined pattern. Madurakavi was well-versed in six agamas, the four vedas, the meemamsa, the puranas, dharma sastras, etc. Once, he proceeded to North India on a pilgrimage to Ayodya, Madura, Kasi, Dwarka etc. in order to attain moksha and salvation.

Meantime, when Nammalwar was born the child never cried, it never sucked the mother's milk. It never opened its eyes. The parents were worried. They however felt that Thirukkurungudi Nambi who promised them an issue would surely have some purpose in blessing them with such a child. 10 days passed and on the 11th day the parents bathed the child, and took it to Adinathar koil at Srinagari situated on the southern banks of Tambaraparani river. The child was put in a gemset gold cradle before God. They named the child Maran. As soon as the cradle was placed in front of the God, the child crawled out of the cradle, took its position in the tamarind tree. It neither opened its mouth nor its eyes, almost as if it did not want to see anything other than God and did not want to speak to any one and wanted to be in communication with God only. As soon as the child crawled to the tree, it assumed a padmasana pose with the forefinger and the thumb forming a gnana mudra. The child remained in that pose in deep meditation for sixteen long years.

In the meantime, Madurakavi in the course of his travels reached Ayodaya. One night after finishing his evening prayers, he lifted his eyes upwards to the sky and he saw in the southern direction a bright effulgence which had the brightness of thousands of Suns. He wondered as to what it could be. He wondered whether any village had caught fire or whether the forest was in flames. The next night the same unusual event occurred. He felt that there was some mystery attached to this nightly vision. He decided to walk South towards the light. All day he would rest and in the dark he travelled towards the beckoning beacon of light. He arrived at Srirangam. The light shone bright farther south. He pursued it steadily till he reached Thirunagari where

the star disappeared. Madurakavi felt that he must resolve this mystery. He felt the bright radiance must be originating from Thirunagari itself. He made local enquiries. He heard about the wonder child which opened neither its eyes nor its mouth and praying undisturbed under the tamarind tree. Madurakavi visited the place. He felt he identified the effulgent star with the brilliance radiating from the saint. Nammalwar was lost in meditation. His eyes were closed. His right hand was half raised. The palm was open. The thumb and the first finger was in gnana mudra making it clear that he was a spiritual yogi. Madurakavi wondered whether the sixteen year old youth had any life at all as he was seated like a statue. He wondered whether he had any ability to hear. He thought he would test both these qualities. He lifted a stone and dropped it on the ground. The noise startled the motionless figure. The figure opened its eyes and immediately smiled at Madurakavi with heavenly beatitude. Madurakavi wanted to check on the ability of this yogic figure to speak. He decided to test that also. He asked the following question:-

செத்தின் வையிற்றில் சிநியது பிறந்தால்
எத்தைத் தின்று எங்கே கிடக்கும்?

i.e. if in the womb of what is dead a subtle thing is born what does it eat and where does it abide? One has to grasp the deep meaning of this question. What is dead i.e. achith refers to the body. The subtle thing that is born is the non-material, formless soul. The answer given by Nammalwar to this cryptic question was

அத்தைத் தின்று அங்கே கிடக்கும்

i.e. it eats that and it abides there. This also clothes a profound truth. It means that the soul enjoys the bodily pleasures and lies bound in the person of that body itself incapable or unwilling to escape from such ephemeral pleasures.

Hearing this cryptic philosophical answer, Madurakavi was pleased as he realised that the person who was before him was a great saint and a great soul with unfathomable depth

of knowledge. He decided to accept him as his spiritual guru to achieve salvation. In due course, God revealed Himself to Nammalwar. The saint burst forth into song and from out of his lips poured the four great hymns which are regarded as the Tamil vedas viz. (a) Tiruviruttam which is the essence of Rig veda, (b) Tiruvasiriyam which is the essence of Yajur veda; (c) Peria Tiruvandadi which is the essence of Atharvana veda and (d) Tiruvoimozhi the essence of Sama veda. Madurakavi was the first disciple who learnt from Nammalwar these hymns, the details of the mysteries of divine love i.e. love between God and man and the possible attainment of salvation by man only through unshakeable implicit faith in God.

Another interesting feature in the life of this saint is that unlike in the case of the other Alwars, Nammalwar never went visiting the varicus divya desams! He spent his whole life meditating under the tamarind tree. The Gods in the various divya desams appeared before his mind's eye and were glorified by Nammalwar by composing songs from the very place where he sat. Thus, the Gods presented themselves before this great devotee seeking his audience and his appreciation.

Yet another interesting story stands testimony to the greatness of the poems composed by Nammalwar. In those sangam days there was a council of 300 learned men of Pandyan kingdom. They questioned the greatness of Nammalwar's poems. In those days the practice was that every poet's work is accepted as great only after a critical test by the council. The members of this council therefore objected when Madurakavi claimed that his teacher Nammalwar was a great saint and poet. They demanded of him to produce his master and his poetry before the members of the Pandyan academy so that they could critically examine and pass a judgement on the literary greatness of Nammalwar's poem! Madurakavi then took out a palm leaf, on which he wrote a few lines from Tiruvaimozhi. This palm leaf was put on a peetha i.e. a plank and it was to be allowed to float on the lotus pond in the temple at Madura, the capital of the Pandyan kingdom. As soon as the palm leaf was put on the peetha, it is said that the other literary works on the peetha submerged in the water. Only the palm leaf with Nammalwar's

poem remained afloat. The council was thus able to set its seal of approval on the greatness of Nammalwar's poems!

SCULPTURE

This temple abounds in rich sculpted pieces. For example, the Thirumanjana mandapam, in front of Nammalwar sannidhi, there are beautiful life size statues of Arjuna, Rajanartaki, Hanuman, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana etc.

A unique sculpted piece of resistance that is shown to all those who visit this temple is a stone nadaswaram. The base is one inch in diameter. It tapers to 1/4" at the top. It is about 1 foot long. This instrument was given to this temple during the times of Krishnappa Nayaka. This nadaswaram is carved out of a single stone. It has regular holes and produces musical notes like any other nadaswaram. This was used as an accompaniment for the Bharata natya performances in the temple. The nadaswaram is known as Mukha veena.

Yet another rare sculpted piece is that of Lakshmi seated on the lap of Vishnu both being carried by Garuda. It belongs to the 12/13th century A.D. Vishnu is seen with eight arms holding the sankhu, chakra, pasam, ankusa, ketaka, kadga respectively in three pairs of arms. The fourth palm of the right shows the varada hasta and the left hand holds the Goddess by the waist. The Goddess is seated on the left lap of Vishnu with Her left hand in the varada mudra and right hand round the waist of Vishnu. Both these figures are seen seated on Garuda who is in a human form. the wings are at the back. The garment worn by Vishnu has been sculpted in such a fine manner that even a fold in the garment can be noticed making it absolutely, astonishingly astoundingly realistic!

The pillars in the mandapam adjoining the Nammalwar sannidhi have got fine architectural details with exquisite dancing figures carved out on the pillars. A set of hollow pillars which give out musical notes when hit with a small stick can also be seen in one of the mandapams. These are musical pillars like the famous ones in Suchindram in Nagercoil town.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:-

A copper plate relating to the year S.1491 in Tamil records the conferring the right of performing samasraya and upadesa and the right to collect kanikkai from the disciples belonging to the communities like pillais, dasis, kongamar and acharis residing in various villages to one Bhattar a descendent of Madhurakavi belonging to Bharadwaja gothram, Jaimini-sutra and Sama sakha. ¹ An inscription relating to the period of Pandya king Maravarman Sundarapandyan found on the southern and northern walls of the Nammalwar shrine in this temple records gift of six achchu paid into the treasury of Alwar Thirukkurugur Mahamunigal for the Brahma vidwan of the village for worship and various offerings to the God in the months of Avani and Vaikasi. ²

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the same shrine relating to the period of the king Jatavarman Kulasekhara records the sale of land as a tax free deva dhana land. ³

Another inscription relating to the period of Maravarman Sundarapandyan records a gift to provide for the various offerings to God on the occasion of the procession on the day of flag hoisting during the festival in Vaikasi. ⁴

On a slab built into the north-eastern corner of the Ranganatha temple records gift of wet and dry land to the Perumal. ⁵

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has sung 11 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of those pasurams along with the song sung by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar on the lord of this Tirupathi along with their meanings are given below:-

¹ Appendix A, ARIE 1973-74.

² Ins.No.523 ARIE 1958-59 Appendix B

³ Ins.No.525 ARIE 1958-59 Appendix B

⁴ Ins.No.526 ARIE 1958-59 Appendix B

⁵ Ins.No.348 ARIE 1960-61 Appendix B

Thiruvaimozhi (4-10-5):-

இலிங்கத் திட்ட புராணத் தீரும் சமணரும் சாக்கியரும்
 விலிந்து வாதுசெய் வீரர்களும் மற்றுநுந் தெய்வமு
 மாகிநிள்ரான்
 மலிந்த செந்நெல் கவரி வீசும் திருக்குரு கூரதனுள்
 பொலிந்து நின்ற பிரான்கண் மர்ஓன்றும் பொய்-
 யில்லை போற்றுபினே.

Meaning:-

Be it those who are following lingapuranam;

or

Be it Jains or Buddhists

or

Be it learned men who participate in hair splitting religious discussions;

Be it the Gods worshipped and spoken of by all of you -

Even the ripe ears of the crops while bending in the breeze appear to be gently fanning (chamaram) the Lord.

The Lord here is the embodiment of all His lovable qualities and divine traits;

Yes that is the gospel truth -

Nothing but the whole truth.

It is not a lie.

It is the eternal truth.

Oh Ye men come here and worship this Lord of Alwar Thirunagari.

(The Alwar says that Perumal is seen in all things and He is all things Himself i.e. to say He is omnipresent and omniscient. He is all, He is in all. He is one He is many).

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirúpathi Andaadhi

வளம் தழைக்க உண்டால் என் ? வாசம் மணத்தால்
 என்?

தெளிந்த கலை கற்றால் என்? சீ! - குளிர்ந்த பொழில்



Adinadar Moolavar



Adinada Perumal Garudasevaj



Nammalwar Annavahanasevai



Alwar Thirunagari Utsavamoorthis

தன் குருகு ஊர் வாவிச் சட்கோபன் ஊர் எங்கள்
வன் குருகூர்' என்னாத வாய்.

Meaning

It is absolutely of no use at all even if one eats rich food or even if one wears scented things and allows that fragrance to overpower the surroundings or

even if one were to learn many thing thro' reading of books so as to have clarity of thinking.

If a person does not utter atleast once in his lifetime the name of the town Thirukurugoor which has cool groves and small walled tanks and claims it as his own town.

Note:-

The poet says that as we are blessed with a tongue atleast once let us utter the word "Thirukurugoor", so that we can attain moksha.

* * *

THIRUKKURUNGUDI

This place is one of the eighteen divya desams in Pandya Nadu. It is located about eight miles from Nanguneri. The Dakshina Sindhu river flows nearby. The river is also known as Nambi Aru i.e. river in Tamil. In this place, at the foot of the hill, God is seen in three poses i.e. lying down posture (bogha sayanam) standing posture and sitting posture. On the hill nearby also there is a sannidhi for the Perumal which is known as Malai Nambi sannidhi i.e. the sannidhi in the hills. About three furlongs from the temple, there is a small rivulet by name Thirupparkadal. On its bank, there is yet another sannidhi for Nambi. At that place He is known as Thirupparkadal Nambi.

Perumal here has got several names. He is known as Nindra Nambi, Kurungudi Nambi, Irundha Nambi, Vaduga Nambi, Vaishnava Nambi, Thirupparkadal Nambi, Malai Nambi. The moolavar is seen in a standing posture facing east. The thayar is known as Kurungudivalli Nachiyar. The theertham is known as Thirupparkadal and Sindhu nadhi. The vimanam is Panchasa Ketaka vimanam. God gave darshan to Siva and Nampaduvan. The utsava murthis of thayar sannidhis are kept along with Perumal in ekasanam in the moolasthanam. Hence in the thayar sannidhis, there is no separate archana i.e. offering of prayers.

This place is also known as Vamana kshetram as the Nambi Perumal who is seen in a standing posture is vamanan. The story of Vamana avataram is so well known that it bears no repetition. It is sufficient to recall here that when the diminutive Vamana took on the form of the gigantic viswaroopa Perumal, one foot covered Brahmaloaka. Brahma then washed that holy feet. When Brahma washed the foot, little drops of water are said to have spilt over to the earth, thus originating Ganga. The theertham in Thirukkurungudi is said to be formed out of a few drops of water that washed the divine foot. Hence the theertham is known as Silambu theertham as also Sindhu nadhi theertham. This place is also known as Dakshina Badri. In Badrikasramam, in the North, Lord Narayana did upadesam of Thirumantram to Naran i.e. man. But in Thirukkurungudi,

a saintly man viz. Emberumanar did upadesam to Sri Nambi who is the archa form of Narayana. Hence it is that this divya desam is known as Dakshina badri.

Kurugam in Sanskrit means deer. Once upon a time, this small village was full of deers. Hence it got the name Kurugu Kudi. As Perumal appeared in this place, the holy prefix Thiru was added to the name resulting in the town getting the name Thirukkurungudi.

The place is also known as Siddhasramam. There is a small hillock nearby which is known as Mahendra malai. There is a sannidhi of Perumal here. It is known as Malai Nambi sannidhi. It is believed that even today number of siddhars are seen there. These siddhars are very dark in colour and people who have seen them say that they are not able to notice their feet, but they can watch the figures doing pradakshinam to the Malai mel Nambi. The Nambi sannidhi on the top of the hillock can be reached through jeep upto some extent. But half way thro' even the jeep has to halt and one has to cover about two kms. distance by foot to reach the sannidhi. The forests are fairly thick. The gurgling noise made by the flowing water in the rivulets, the hanging boughs, the chirping and twittering of the birds makes one believe that what Shakesphere said can be seen here viz. that there are tongues in trees, books in brooks and sermons in stones. The local people believe that once upon a time, Agasthiya rishi lived in this hill.

If one spends a night in the Malai Nambi sannidhi, one can hear weird noises. It is said that Yama pattinam i.e. Yamas kingdom is closeby. In Tamil they say that "Kooppidum dooraththil Yama pattanam Irukkiradhu" i.e. to say that Hell is within hearing reach of this place. The noises and cries heard in the night are said to be emanating from the denizens of Yamaloka. Not a very comforting thought to be that close to Yama loka.

Kari Maharaja and Udaiya Nangai, the parents of the great Vaishnavite savant Nammalwar are said to have prayed to Nambi Perumal to be blessed with a heir. That heir apparent was

Nammalwar. The story of Nammalwar, the vaishnavite savant and the Tamil Vedas that he propounded has been related in one of the earlier chapters.

There are five sannidhis for Nambi Perumal here. In the standing posture He is known as Thrivikrama; As Thiruparkadal nambi, He is in Vamana form. In the sitting posture, He is known as Sridharan; in the lying down posture, He is known as Padmanaba. On the top of the hill, He is known as Hrishikesa. The Nambi in the standing posture is a very beautiful idol. It is the beauty of this idol which captivated Nammalwar and made him describe the idol in great detail in the pasurams in Thiruvaimozhi 5th decade. The extracts from the pasurams describing the Perumal are as follows:-

“சங்கினோடும், நேமியோடும், தாமரைக் கண்களோடும்
செங்கனிவாய்
ஒன்றி னோடும் மின்னு நூலும், குண்டலமும், மார்பில்
திருமனுவும், மன்னு பூணும், நான்கு தோளும்,
வென்றி வில்லும், தண்டும் வாரும்,
பூந்தண் மாலை தண் துழாயும், பொன் முடியும்
வடிவும்,
பாங்கு தோன்றும் பட்டும், நாணும்,
தொக்கசி சோதித் தொண்டைவாயும், நீண்ட புறுவங்-
களும்
கோலநீள் கொடிமுக்கும், கனிவாயும், நீல மேனியும்
நான்கு தோளும்
நீண்ட பொன் மேனியோடும்”.

Translated it means:-

The Perumal

Is holding the conch;

He is wielding discuss;

He is lotus eyed;

His mouth is red in colour like a pomogranet seed;

His sacred thread is bright and glittering;

His ears are adorned with Kundalams (earrings)

He has a mole on his right chest;
He is adorned with beautiful ornaments;
He looks majestic with four shoulders;
He wields the victorious bow, mace and sword
He is wearing the cool basil (Tulsi) garland round his neck
He is golden hued
He looks beautiful with the silken raiment;
His lips are red like the kovai fruit;
His eyebrows are long and beautiful;
His acquiline nose is long and looks like a tender creeper;
His mouth is bewitchingly beautiful;
His body has an ethereal blue hue;
The whole is a dazzling golden appearance.

The temple at Thirukkurungudi follows the Vaikanasa agama sastra. In these temples, the idols are usually painted in a very colourful manner. It is interesting to digress a bit here and explain how these colours are created. It is said that the procedure for creating these colours are laid down in detail in Viswakarmiya silpa sastra. The green colour is obtained by mixing copper powder (thambiram) with gomiyan i.e. the urine of the cow. This mixture is kept inside an earthen kalasam buried in the earth where no air and light is allowed to penetrate the vessel. After some time, the mixture when used gives a delightful green colour. Similarly, the reddish orange colour which comes close to nature's colour of the pomegranate fruit is got by mixing Jathi lingam which is an indigenous drug used in siddha vaidya practice. This is kept in an earthen pot buried for some time. Such a burying process is called "mukku vaithal". Black colour is got by powdering kadukkai (galnut), boiling it in hot water along with gomiyan i.e. urine of the cow. The white colour is got by burning shanku i.e. shell and then mixing the powder in water. Yellow is got by mixing the true turmeric powder.

In the sayana pose, we see Nambi with Sridevi and Bhodevi by His side. Sridevi is seen in the dazzling golden yellow colour. Bhodevi is seen in a dark green colour. The bhattars

explain that Mahalakshmi is described in puranas as "golden hued" Hence the painted yellow colour. Bhoodevi is represented in green colour because she was rescued from the depths of the ocean by Perumal. Her stay in the bottom of the ocean had allowed some moss to stick to Her.

On the walls of the moolasthanam, there is a painting which itself needs to be seen in detail and appreciated. The painting depicts the nitya suris who are usually staying with Perumal in Thirupparkadal. They are seen on the wall behind Sridevi and Bhoodevi idols in a posture indicating that they are praying to the God who is in his bogha sayana pose. Perumal himself is sleeping on the five headed divine couch Adisesha. Adisesha is depicted here in a gora i.e. fierce pose. The hoods are painted red. So is the mouth and the tongues. It creates a mental picture of Adisesha emitting fire and brimstone. The Bhattars explain that Adisesha is shown in a ferocious pose with a purpose. When the milky ocean was churned, amrut came out of it. It is said that Adisesha was worried that Bhoomidevi may succumb to the temptation of recommending to Perumal to give some portion of the precious amruth to Madhu-Kaitapas, rakshasas who are her children. In the wall facing Adisesha's hood two human beings are painted. They are said to represent Madhu Kaitapas rakshasas. They are shown as if they are running away, frightened by the ferocious look of Adisesha.

Between the sannidhis of Ninra Nambi and Kidantha Nambi sannidhis i.e. of Nambi perumal in standing and lying down postures there is a sannidhi for Lord Siva. Siva plucked the fifth head of Brahma out of pique and thereby committed Brahmahatty dosha. The kapalam of Brahma stuck to the fingers of Lord Siva and Siva could not get rid of it. It is believed that Siva offered worship to Nambi here and with the blessing of the thayar, He was able to atone for the Brahmahatty dosha. The Siva sannidhi is therefore next to the Perumal sannidhi. Even today the prasadam prepared in the kitchen attached to the Nambi Perumal temple is used also for the offering made to Siva. The people who sing the praise of Lord Siva refer to him as "Pakkaththil Nindra Mahendragiri nathar". These words in Tamil literally translated refer to Lord Siva in his sannidhi as

Mahendragirinatha who is standing next to Nambi. Thirumangai Alwar who was a Siva Baktha originally before he became an ardent Vishnu devotee also in his pasuram in Peria Thirumozhi refers to Nambi Perumal as standing next to a person who is wearing the tiger skin as his dress i.e. Lord Siva.

This place is famous for yet another reason. Thirumangai Alwar attained moksha at this place. Thirumangai Alwar did a lot of renovation work at Srirangam and then prayed to Lord Ranganatha to give him moksha as he felt he had completed his life's duty. But Lord Ranganatha advised him to go to his house to the south of Srirangam. This divya desam referred to by Lord Ranganatha is said to be Thirukkurungudi. Thirumangai Alwar accordingly came to Thirukkurungudi. Here also he spent his time renovating the temple. It is believed that it is the influence of Thirumangai Alwar and his long association with Srirangam temple which accounts for the eastern gopura vasal at Thirukkurungudi resembling the southern gopura vasal at Srirangam. Thirumangai Alwar requested the Nambi Perumal also to give him moksha. He was advised to visit the divya desams in the north and offer worship to all the archa roopas there. Alwar finished that as well and returned to Thirukkurungudi. On one Vaikunta ekadasi day when the festival was being celebrated in a grand way and the vaikunta vasal was opened and God was taken round in the prakaram, it is said that Thirumangai Alwar demanded angrily from God as to why he was not as yet being blessed with moksha. Apparently, this offer of spiritual resistance by the great Alwar won the day. God is said to have blessed him with moksha. To the east of the town on the banks of the river there is a small temple known as Thirumangai Alwar Thiruvarasu.

Yet another story associated with this temple relates to an incident that occurred in the life of Ramanuja, the great vaishnavite sage. About 3/4 miles away from Thirukkurungudi in the middle of Thirupparkadal river, there is a stone base known as Thirupparivattaparai. It is a big boulder. On this hillock there is a sannidhi for Ramanuja. Once upon a time, Udaiyavar was being chased by the enemies who wanted to kill him. Nambi Perumal then is said to have kept him on that

stone in the middle of the river and saved him. In this place, we also see a unique pose where the Perumal is seen standing in a very humble posture like that of a dutiful student and Udaiyavar is sitting on a simhasana as if he is the teacher. It is believed that Udaiyavar did mantropadesam to Perumal at this spot. There is a small story connected with this incident. When Emberumanar visited Thirukkurungudi Nambi, Perumal took on the guise of a sishya and asked Ramanuja as to when even God could not reform people and make them forget bonds of samsara, how Ramanuja a mere man expected to reform the people with his teachings. Emberumanar is then reported to have haughtily replied in Tamil.

“கேட்கும் அளவில் கேட்கப் பட்டால்
சொல்லும் அளவில் சொல்லு வோம்”.

Literally translated it means that Emberumanar gave a dictum that if the question is asked in the manner in which it should be asked, a fitting reply will be given. Immediately, Nambi Perumal caught the point, offered Emberumanar swamy the asanam made him sit like a teacher and Vaduga Nambi stood like a dutiful student by his side. Ramanuja then whispered in the right ear of Nambi Perumal the Thirumantram. It is also said that one day Ramanuja was applying the vaishnavite caste mark on himself when some amount of the namam paste was left on his palm. The usual belief is that whatever is left in the hand after applying the white mark should not be washed away. But instead should be used for applying it to some other person. On that particular day an old brahmin appeared before Ramanuja and requested that what is left on his hand may be applied to him. Ramanuja obliged. Later when Ramanuja went to the moolasthanam to offer worship, he was amazed to find that Nambi Perumal who usually sported only the srichurnam also had the white caste mark applied earlier by Ramanuja to the old brahmin. Hence it is that Nambi Perumal here is also known as Ramanuja Nambi and also as Vaishnava Nambi. This incident of Ramanuja of having Perumal as his student is celebrated every year in the month of Chitirai when Thiruvadirai star is in the ascendant when thiruman is holy caste mark is applied to Nambi Perumal.

There are a few interesting sthala puranas associated with this divya desam. To now mention those stories.

NAMPADUVAN STORY

There was a harijan by name Nampaduvan living near Thirukkurungudi. He was a great devotee of Nambi. Everyday he would go to the temple and sing the praise of God. As he belonged to a low caste in those days he was not allowed to enter the garbagriha. He used to stand outside near the dwajasthambam and sing in praise of the Lord. God was so moved by his songs that He wanted to have a clear uninterrupted vision of that devotee. He ordered the dwajasthambam to move to a side. Hence it is that in this temple the dwajasthambam is not exactly opposite the moolavar but to one side.

Among the ragas, kaisika ragam is considered to be the most melodious and best raga. Nampaduvan always used to sing the praise of the God in Kaisika ragam. Everyday Nampaduvan would visit the Nambi temple in the night after the poojas are over, sing the song in Kaisika ragam, please the god and then return for taking his meals. Once he decided to observe Ekadasi vratha. He would fast on the Ekadasi day, visit the temple, offer his customary devotional music and only then break his fast on the dwadasi day. Once during the Karthikai month Sukla Ekadasi day after his vratham, on dwadasi day, he was going to Thirukkurungudi temple to fulfill his vow. Enroute a brahma rakshasa way laid him and wanted to prevent him from going to the temple, threatening to devour him, immediately. Brahma rakshasas are said to be people who, in their previous birth, had an akala maranam i.e. untimely death. This particular brahma rakshasa was, in his previous birth, a brahmin by name Soma sarma. He had performed a religious function for four days and before it could be completed (it needed seven full days of religious performance) he died. He was therefore born as a brahma rakshasa. Nampaduvan when waylaid by the brahma rakshasa requested him to allow him to go to Nambi, sing his usual song, complete his Ekadasi vratha without any blot. He then assured the rakshasa that on his way back, he would return by the same path and offer himself without any reservation to the brahma rakshasa as food. The discussion between the

Brahma rakshasa and Nampaduvan made it abundantly clear to the Brahma rakshasa that Nampaduvan was a great religious person. As stated earlier, Brahma rakshasas also are basically religious persons in their previous birth. The brahma rakshasa therefore tested Nampaduvan in various scriptures and religious teachings. Finding that the Nampaduvan stood up to the test well, he was inclined to believe the word of Nampaduvan. He allowed him to go to Thirukkurungudi on condition that he would return the next day and satisfy his hunger. Nampaduvan as usual went to the temple, rendered his songs before God and without any qualms decided to return by the same forest route to fulfill the word given to the brahma rakshasa. Nambi Perumal wanted to save his devotee. He transformed himself into an old brahmin, met Nampaduvan enroute in the forest, asked him to avoid the forest. Nampaduvan explained to the old brahmin the need to keep up his word and said that he was not afraid of going through the forest path. The old brahmin blessed Nampaduvan and then disappeared. The old brahmin was Thirukkurungudi Nambi who wanted to test the sterling quality of His devotee Nampaduvan. Nampaduvan proceeded thro' the forest. He met the Brahma rakshasa at the agreed spot where he had met him the previous night. The brahma rakshasa realised that here indeed was a very unusual devotee who must be thrice blessed by God. He thought that he would use this devotee to attain moksha and redeem himself from his past sins in having akala maranam and not having completed the religious rites which he had taken up in his previous birth. The rakshasa requested Nampaduvan to pass on to him the punya i.e. blessing he had accumulated by singing before Perumal the previous night. Nampaduvan would have none of such a request. He said that he wanted all that grace of God for himself so that he could attain salvation. The rakshasa would not leave it at that. He fell at the feet of Nampaduvan and sought sarangathi. Immediately Nampaduvan told the brahma rakshasa that he would give to the demon the benefit of the song that he sang before Nambi Perumal and that he would thereby get rid of his sins and attain moksha.

The sloka told by Nampaduvan to the brahma rakshasa is as follows:-

*"Yenmaya paschimam geetham swaram kaisikamuthamam
palena tasya Badramthae moksha ishyami kilbhishath".*

Freely translated the meaning of the sloka is as follows:

Tonight you sing in Kaisika Ragam the praise of the Lord and you will be rid of your sins and will attain moksha.

The brahma rakshasa then attained moksha. This soul stirring incident is enacted even to-day on the Karthikai sukla panchami Ekadasi day in this temple town. This story is repeated in Kaisika mahatyam as also in Varaha puranam.

ARAIYAR STORY

Azhagiya Nambi is said to be a Gana priya i.e. a lover of music. Once upon a time, Thirukkunrungudi was famous for its araiyar families. The araiyars are a select set of families who would sing before God and enact the puranas and divya prabandhams along with thalam, abinayam and vyakyanam is metre, mime and exposition before God. The South Mada street in Thirukkurungudi was known as Sri Bashya street. This street had more than fifty houses belonging to the araiyars. But unfortunately today there is not even a single araiyar family in this town. All have migrated to Srivaikuntam, Srirangam, etc. It is believed that long ago when the araiyars lived in Thirukkurungudi one particular araiyar was teaching the song and the dance lesson to his son in the shade of an avarai i.e. beans pandal. Suddenly he discovered that his son was not paying any attention to the lesson, but instead was lost in admiration at somethingelse which seemed to distract him. The araiyar got angry and chided the son. The son then replied that he was enjoying the sight of Shanku Chakra Gadhadari Perumal who was standing under the avari pandal. The araiyar thought his son was bluffing. But when he turned his head, he also had the vision of Perumal, Nada priya Azagiya Nambi standing under the pandal enjoying the abinaya, lost in the song with a supremely happy contented look on His face. As proof of this incident, even to-day when the Araiya swamy assemble in front of the Azhagiya Nambi sannidhi when the Sri Jeer swamy and other vaishnavite devotees are present and when the pasurams are

sung with abinayam, the following two couplets are rendered. These two couplets refer to the incident which took place long ago when God was present at one of the rehearsals conducted by the araiyar swamy.

1. வளர் அரையர் திருமனை
யில்வந்து அவரை நிழல்
தணிலே வண்காமை கேட்ட
பெருமாள்.
2. வண்டமிழ்த் தம்பிரான் மார்கள்
தேவ காள மொடு மளம்
உருக வாழ்த்தும் பெருமாள்
3. வழியில் ஒரு கைசிகனோர் வரம்
உதவ பிரம ராக்கதர் தனை உய்யவே நின்ற
பெருமாள்
4. எம்பிரான் பெருமைகளை
மனமுருக வாழ்த்தும்
எழில் தம்பிரான் மாரி
களுக்கு தஞ்சமாகிய பெருமாள்

The meaning of the above couplets is as follows:-

1. The Perumal who stood in the shade of the pandal of beans plant and was lost in appreciation of the pasurams rendered by the araiyar.

2. The Perumal who is worshipped and praised by the arayers thro' their soul stirring divine music.

3. The Perumal who helped the devotee to release a Brahma rakshasa of his sins (Kaisika EKadasi)

4. The Perumal who is ever affectionately beholden to the arayers who in their soul stirring music, praise His great qualities and thereby have captivated Him.

Is the Perumal of Thirukkurungudi.

Thirukkurungudi Nambi is perhaps the only Perumal who is referred to as Natha Vinathan i.e. lover of music. He is also

known as Ganam Kettu Ugandhavan. (person who became great by listening to music)

THE STORY OF THE BELL

In the Nambi Perumal koil in the inner prakaram, there is a huge bell. When it is rung, it gives a very resounding loud ring. The sound waves which emanate can be felt for quite some time. It is said that this bell was installed by a Chera king by name Aditya varma. He gave this in 1463 A.D. This gift of his is recorded in the following inscription on a wall inside the temple.

செய்துங்க நாட்டு சிறைவாய் மன்னுதித்யன் தென்
வஞ்சியான் விய லொன்று அகில கலையானன்
கள்ளி விசாகம் வந்தோன் நயமொன்று கொல்லம்
அறு நூற்று நாற்பத்தி நாவினான் பால் அய-
னும் பணியும் நம்பிக்கு மணி அணித்தான் அன்பு
கொண்டே.

Literally translated the song conveys the following meaning:

"Kollan 646th year Adityan king of Seyathunga Nadu - ever great king - Born in Puratasi month, visaka star - Gifted a bell to Thirukurungudi Nambi who is worshipped by Lord Brahma also."

It is said that the Chera king had great faith in Nambi Perumal. He spent a long time in Thirukkunrungudi worshipping the Perumal. He used to partake of the prasadam and lived happily. Indue course, he had to return to Kerala. But his heart was in Thirukkurungudi.

All the time he was thinking of Nambi. He decided that even in distant Kerala he would eat his evening meal and sleep only after the food was offered as neivedhya to Nambi Perumal at Thirukkurungudi. He therefore had this big bell installed in the Nambi Perumal koil at Thirukkurungudi. Enroute between Thirukkurungudi and Trivandrum in various vaishnavite temples he had similar bells installed. As soon as the ardha jama

pooja for Nambi Perumal temple at Thirukkurungudi would be rung, the noise would be picked up by the vaishnavite temples enroute and each of them would ring the bell. This relay action would result in the sound being picked up by each temple enroute and finally reach Trivandrum. The king would partake of his meals only after hearing the ringing of the bell in the Trivandrum temple. Such was his devotion, faith and belief in Nambi Perumal.

It is believed that Azhagar Perumal of Thirumaliruncholai near Madurai came to Thirukkurungudi and witnessed the brahmotsavam celebrated in the month of Aadi. At that time when the Thiru thare utasavam is Radha Utsava was being celebrated, the thare i.e. the radha stopped in front of the house belonging to a poor lady. The lady was poor materiastically speaking; but by virtue of her sincerity and devotion, she was a very rich person. The chariot stopped in front of her house and would not move from that place. The archakas realised that there was some divine leela in this apparent impediment. They went into the house and saw that the great old lady had prepared humble kana pongal and some very ordinary vegetable curry. The archakas realised that Azhagar wanted to partake of this simple meal of the great devotee. The same was brought and offered to Azhagar as prasadam and only then the chariot moved from that place. This is a karna paramparai i.e. a story which has no basis in any purana but it is repeated by word of mouth by generation to generation. The only other story which can be compared to this is when Rama partook of the fruits collected so affectionately by Sabari and tasted in bits to ensure that the fruits were worthy and sweet enough to be offered to her favourite Lord Rama. But then Karana Parampara story cannot be wished away as a tall story as even to-day whenever Thiru thare is Radha utsavam takes place in the month of Aadi when the Uthiradam star is in the ascendent, Kana pongal and the same simple vegetable curry is prepared and offered as neivedhyam to the Perumal and all the devotees including the Jeer swamy partake of that humble repast. On that day the songs composed by Andal and other always in praise of Azhagar is sung.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

On the north wall of the central shrine of the Nambirayar temple there is an inscription relating to the period of Maravarman Sundarapandyan which records the gift of land to the God Nambi who was pleased to stand at Thirukkurungudi.¹

On the southern wall of the Maha mandapa of the same temple, there is an inscription relating to the Pandyan king Kulasekhara Pandya which records the gift of land in Thirukkurungudi made free from taxes for various offerings to the deities.²

On a stone built into the floor in the first prakara, there is an inscription relating to the period of the same Pandyan king Kulasekhara which records the gift of 25 cows for the supply of ghee for lighting a perpetual lamp. The cows were entrusted to a Sadayan.³

Another inscription on the side of the Balipita refers to 25 sheep and 20 kalangu of gold, apparently gifts made for providing offerings to the temple.⁴

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the Thirumangai Alwar shrine relating to the period of the Pandyan king Konerinmaikondan Tribhuvana chakravartin records the grant of land for feeding Sri vaishnavas at Thirumangai matta.⁵

Yet another inscription on a slab set up on the road side near the choultry refer to grant of land for feeding brahmins at the local choultry. It is said that this gift was made when the God at Thirukkurungudi was seated with His retinue on the Ramadeva maharajas' seat under the Udaiya Marthanda canopy.⁶

¹ Ins.No.351 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B.

² Ins.No.352 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B

³ Ins.No.353 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B

⁴ 4. Ins.No.354 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B

⁵ Ins.No.355 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B

⁶ Ins.No.356 and 357 ARIE 1959/60 Appendix B

HYMNOLOGY

Perialwar, Thirumazhisai Alwar, Nammalwar, and Thirumangai Alwar have sung 40 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. A few of such Pasurams along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Perialwar Thirumozhi (1-5-8):-

உள்ளையும ஓக்கலையில் கொண்டெதமில் மருவி
 உள்ளொடு தங்கள் கருத்தாயின செய்து வரும்
 கள்ளியரும் மகிழக் கண்டவர் கண்டவர் கண்குணிரக்
 கற்றவர் தெற்றிவரப் பெற்றவெனக் கருளி
 மன்னு குறுங்குடியாய் வெள்ளறையாய் மதின்கூழ்
 சோஸை மலைக் கரசே கண்ணபுரத்தமுதே
 என் அவலம் களைவாய் ஆடுக செங்கீரை
 ஏழுலகுமுடையாய் ஆடுக ஆடுகவே.

Meaning

Oh You who live in peaceful Kurungudi;
 Oh you who are in the town known as Thiruvellarai;
 Oh you who are the master of Thirumaliruncholai which
 is surrounded by rampart walls;
 Oh You who are the nectar of Thirukannapuram;
 Oh You who resolve all my problems;
 Oh Krishna (ever delightful child)

The women folk carry you on their waists and affectionately converse with You meaningless inanities and derive immeasurable pleasure;

All those whose eyes rest on You experience a beautiful calm. The poets watch Your Childish pranks and compose poems (Pillai Kavigal)

On Krishna, Lord of all the Seven worlds Please take pity on me and strike the Sengeerai pose so that, I your mother, could experience the greatest happiness.

Note:-

Sengeerai pose is one where the crawling tiny tot presses its two knees and two elbows on the ground and tries to hold erect its tiny head and strikes a loving stunning pose which pulls at the heart stings of its mother.

Thirumazhisai Alwar:-

Thiruchanda Virutham - 62nd song:-

கரண்ட மாடு பொய்கையுள் கரும்பனைப் பெரும் பழம்
புரண்டு வீழ வானை பாய் குறுங்குடி நெடுந்தசாய்!
திரண்ட தொள் இரணியன் சினங் கொள் ஆகமொன்-
ரையும்
இரண்டு கூறு செய்து கந்த சிங்கம் என்பதுள்ளையே.

Meaning:-

Oh Lord who resides at Thirukkurungudi where the valai fish, frightened by the fall of a ripe black palm fruit into the tank where water fowl play, leap up

Oh Lord devotees refer to You as the furious Narasimha Who split into two the broad shouldered asura Hiranyan.

(Here alwar says that Thirukkurungudi Nambi Perumal is none other than Lord Narasimha.)

Namalwar Thiruvaimozhi (5-5-1):-

எங்ஙனயோ அன்னைமீரகாள் என்னை முனிவதி நீர்
நங்கள் சோலத் திருக்குறங்குடி நம்பியை நாள் கண்-
டபிள்
சங்கினோடும் நெமியோடும் தாமரைக் கண்களோடும்
செங்கனிவாய் ஒன்றினோடும் செல்கின்றது என் நெஞ்-
சமே.

Meaning:-

Ever since I (Nammalwar has transformed himself into Parakala Nayaki) saw Thirukkurungudi Nambi, I am completely lost to this world. My mind is torn to distraction thinking only

of His divine beauty. Seeing this state of mine, my mother admonished me.

Oh mother what is the use of scolding me?

Ever since I saw the bewitching beauty of Thirukurungudi Nambi, my heart goes only to His sanku and chakra, to His Lotus eyes, to His lips looking red like ripened fruits, I am God intoxicated. I am overwhelmed by His bewitching beauty.

Thirumangai Alwar Peria Thirumozhi (1-5-8)

ஏவினார் கலியார் நலிக என்றென்மேல்
எங்ஙனே வாழமாறு? ஐவர்,
கோவினார் செய்யும் கொடுமையை மடித்தேன்
குறுங்குடி நெடுங்கடல் வண்ணா!
பாவினார் இன்சொல் பன்மலர் கொண்டுள்
பாதமே பரவி நான் பணிந்து, என்
நாவினால் வந்துள் திருவடி அடைந்தேன்
நைமி சாரணியத்துள் நெதாய்!.

Meaning:-

Oh ocean hues Perumal of Kurunkudi
The one who resides at Naimasaranyam
Oh Kali purusha,

You threw the Panchendriyams on me and ordered them to trouble me.

You thought that I would not survive
But do you know how I got over this hurdle?

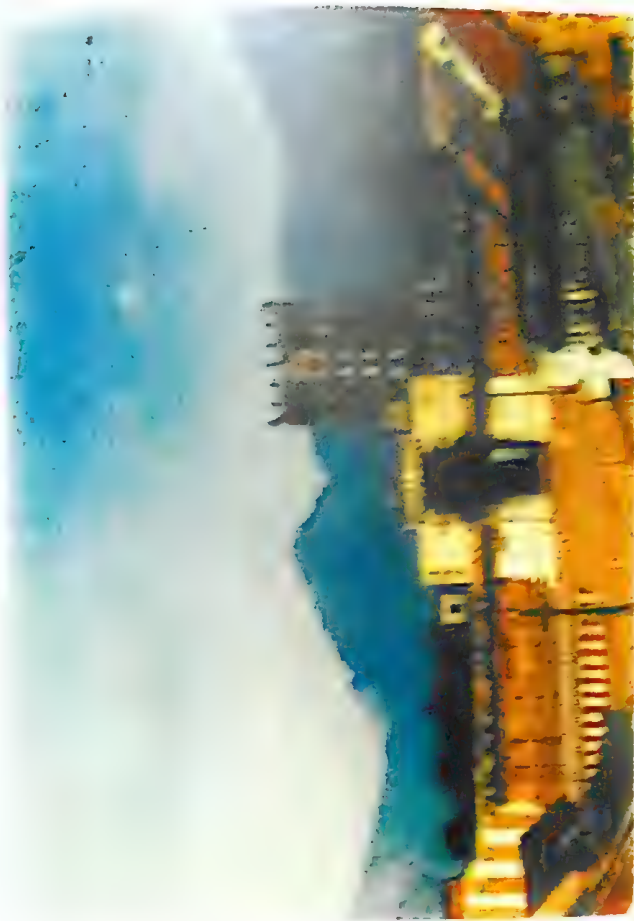
Yes I survived because I used my tongue to coin sweet words of praise (stotram) and placed that garland of words at your feet. Now I am secure and safe.

Divyakavi Pillai Iyengars's 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi:-

தாலத்து இழிகுலத்துச் சண்டாலா மானாலும்
மேலத்தி வரதளிள மேன்மைத்தே - கோலக்
குறுங்குடி வாழ் மாயன். குரை கழற்கு ஆளாகப்
பெறுங்குடியாய் வாழ்வார் பிறப்பு.



Thirukkurungudi Utsavamoorthi



Thirukkurungudi Temple View



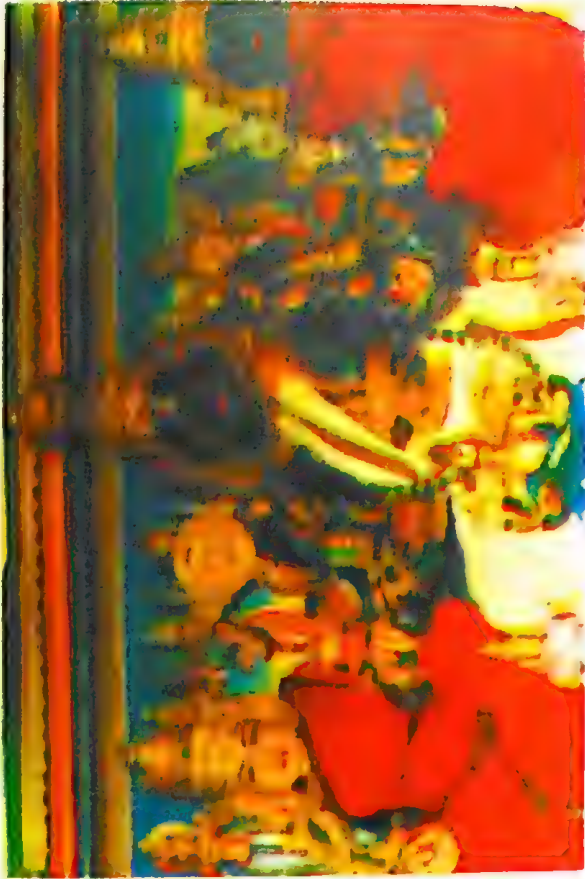
Thirukkurungudi Nindra Nambi Moolavar



Thirukkurungudi Thirupparkadal Nambi



Thirukkurngudi Utsavamoorthi



Thirukkurngudi Irunda Nambi Moolavar

Meaning:-

Knowing the greatness of Lord Krishna those who seek refuge and surrender at the feet of the Perumal at beautiful Thirukkurungudi, even if they belong to the deprived class on earth, they can live as great persons.

* * *

THIRU KOODAL AZHAGAR KOIL

This divya desam is in Madurai city itself very near the bus stand. Madurai is an important junction in the Southern Railway. As such approach to this divya desam is very easy. The moolavar is known as Koodal Azhagar. He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. Thayar is known as Maduravalli. She has a separate sannidhi. She is also known as Vakulavalli, Varagunavalli, Maragatha valli. The theerthams are Hema pushkarini, Chakra theertham, Hruthamala river and Vaigai river. The vimanam is Ashtanga vimanam. God appeared to Brighu maharishi, Sounaka maharishi and Perialwar. This place is famous as the place where Perialwar composed his Thiruppallandu and sang in praise of the Lord when He appeared before him.

Everybody is aware of the river Vaigai flowing near Madurai. But in the puranas and in the Sangam age literature, it is evident that this river was flowing as two rivers and encircling Madurai in the form of a garland. One part of that river was known as Kiruthamalai. This was flowing near the Koodal Azhagar Koil. On both sides of the Kirutha malai there were plenty of plantain trees and hence the area itself was known as Kadali vanam. In the midst of that kadalivanam was situated the Koodal Azhagar koil. Till recently this Kirutha malai nadhi was having plenty of flow of water; it was a wide river. Some people even believe that Kirutha malai river is older than and more holy than Vaigai. Koodar puranam explains as to how this river was named as Kirutha malai.

வேக மாதலான் வேகவதி என்றும்
மாகம் வாய்ந்ததனால் வையை என்றும் தார்
ஆதலால் கிருதமாலை தாம் என்றும்
நாகர் முப்பெயர் நாட்டு நதியரோ?

This means that Vegavathi was the river which flowed fast. When God took the form of Thirivikrama and one of His feet covered Satyaloka and Brahma washed that feet and drops of water fell on earth and blessed this earth; the river was known as Vaiyai. Vaiyai in Tamil means this earth. One branch of

that river became like a garland to Koodal Azhagar and so it was known as Kirutha malai. This Kirutha malai itself later came to be known as Vaigai is what some others believe! This is evident from the following which is a song from Kalithogai padal (Maruda kali 2).

தார் முற்றியது போல்த் தகைபூத்த வையைதன்
நீரி முற்றி மதில் பொருவும் பகையலால் நேராதார்
போ ரிமுற் றொன்றறியாழ புலை சூழிந்த வயலூரன்

The lines convey the meaning that this Perumal is aware of only the Vaigai river surrounding his fort like a garland. He is not aware of any enemy of His having surrounded His fort in the manner in which the river surrounds it. In brief, it means that the Vaigai river is encircling this temple.

Let us now turn to the Sthala puranam of this divya desam.

Sathyavratthan, a Pandya king was having great belief in Koodal Azhagar. He used to worship and do dyana of Koodal Azhagar. One day as he was praying on the banks of the Kirutha malai river and was doing jala tarpanam in the water in his folded hands a fish appeared. He believed that it was Perumal who had appeared before him in His matsyavataram. The Pandya king since then adopted the fish as the symbol in his flag. This story is repeated in Srimad Bhagavatham written by Vyasa as is evident from the following words.

ஏகதா கிருதமாலாயாம் குர்வதோ ஜல தர்ப்பணம்
தஸ்யாம் ஜலியுதகே காசித் சபரியேனாபி அபத்யத
ஸதியவ்ரதோ அனசலிகதாம் ஸஹதோயேந பரத
உத்ஸ ஸரீஜ நதீதோயே சபரீம் நீராவிடசவர

From this extract it is evident that Perumal incarnated in His matsyavataram on the banks of the Kirutha malai nadhi and the Koodal city is on the banks of that river. The Bhagavatham (Mudal Skandam 5th Adyayana 38/39 86 slokam) further adds very significantly that towards the end of Kaliyuga, on the banks of the Kirutha malai nadhi Vishnu bakthas will be born.

“கலெள கலு பவிஷ்யந்தி நாராயண பராயண!
 க்வசித் க்வசித் மஹாபாகாத்ரமிடே ஷிச பூரிச:
 தாம்ரபரிணீ நதீயத்ர க்ருதமாலா பயஸ் விநீ!
 காவேரி ச மஹாபாகா ப்ரதீசே ஸரஸ்வதி!!”

It is believed that towards the end of kaliyuga mahathmas will be born in numbers on the banks of the rivers like Tambaraparan, kiruthamala, palar, kaveri, saraswathi and other holy rivers and vaishnavism will be propogated as the sole sure path to attain salvation. This statement found in Bhagavatham can be interpreted to mean that even when Vyasa wrote bhagavatham he anticipated that Perialwar the great vaishnavite savant will be born near Madurai and worship the Koodal Azhagar on the banks of kirutha mala nadhi and prove to be a great religious reformer and leader of importance.

In Kirutha yugam also this Koodal Azhagar temple was in existence. It is said that the manasaputhran of Brahma, Sanathkumaran wanted to build a temple for Narayana. In accordance with his wishes, Visvakarma came to Pandya desa and on the banks of Kirutha mala nadhi in the midst of a Kadalivanam, built an ashtanga vimanam and underneath that vimanam, Perumal and Thayar gave darsan to the devotees. Further in this Kiruthayugam Lord Siva married Parvati. To the south east direction of the Ashtanga vimanam there was a tank with a golden lotus (Potramarai kulam). Lord Siva did penance on its bank in order to marry Uma devi. Koodal Azhagar was pleased with his tapas and He assisted in getting Uma devi married to Siva with the help of Saptha rishis. Thus the glory of performing Siva Parvathi kalyanam belongs to Koodal Azhagar in Kirutha yugam.

In Treta yugam also this Koodal Azhagar temple was in existence. It is said that at that time Brighu Chakravarthi as a consequence of his sincere devoted prayers, secured a vimanam which had the ability to fly all over. He used to visit the various pilgrim centres. One day as he was flying, the shadow of his vimanam fell on the Ashtanga vimanam at Thirukoodal. Immediately, the vimanam of Brighu chakravarthi was not able to proceed further. He came down to earth. Brighu wondered

what was causing the obstruction. He visited the Ashtanga vimanam and saw Koodal Azhagar Sundararaja Perumal giving darshan from beneath that vimanam. He immediately fell at his feet, stayed on in the same place for many years and did a lot of renovation and construction work to Azhagar temple and later attained paramapadam.

In Dwapara yugam also this Koodal Azhagar temple and Lord Sundararaja Perumal were in existence. Ambarisha Maharaja was a well known great devotee. He was a raja rishi. He was a very great Vishnu baktha. The story as to how Durvasa tied, to break his dwadasi vratha is well known. It is said that amongst the many pilgrim centres visited by Ambarisha rishi was the Koodal Azhagar temple on the banks of Kirutha mala nadhi. He is said to have offered his worship to the Perumal here and then attained Paramapadam.

In Kali yugam Purooravas emperor also did a lot of kainkaryam to Koodal Azhagar and then attained moksha. His son Indradyumnan also continued the work, started by his father. The son of Indradyumnan was Malayadwaja Pandyan. He went north, defeated a number of chieftains and was able to plant his flag atop the Himalayam mountains. He is referred to by Perialwar as Pandya Kulapathi. Perialwar also praises the great quality and the bravery of this Pandya Kulapathi who was able to have the Pandyan flag hoisted on the top of the Himalayan mountains. If Perialwar has praised this king, he must have been a Vishnu baktha. The following sentences of Perialwar which praise this Kulapathi Pandyan are proof of this.

பருப் பதத்துக் கயல் பொறித்த பாண்டியர்
குலபதிபோல்
திருப் பௌத்த சேவடிஎன் செண்ணியின்
மேற்பொறித்தாய்.

Literally translated this means that the Pandya king hoisted his flag on the top of the Himalayas; in a similar manner you have placed your divine feet on the top of my head.

In the Sangam literature also Koodal Azhagar finds mention in very many places. For example in "Madurai Kanchi" song written by Mangudi Marudananar refers to the festivals celebrated by Nedunchezhian, Pandyan king, to Koodal Azhagar Perumal. In the month of Avani, when Thiruvonam star is in the ascendant it is said a number of festivals were celebrated by this Pandya king. Referring to these festivals, the poet Mangudi Marudananar, in Madurai Kanchi padal says, 'Mayon meya Ona Nannal' meaning the day liked by Perumal when the Thiruvonam star was in the ascendant. Some also believe that Koodal Azhagar Perumal was Himself a Sangam time pulavar i.e. pandit. The word Koodal during Sangam times, refers to a congregation of pandits. In one such group this beautiful Perumal was seated and henceforth he was referred to as Koodal Azhagar. In Tholkappiam there is one sootram i.e. some lines in Kochaga Aragam where Koodal Azhagar is praised. It runs as follows:

“வாளார் எழில் மழைவளம் நந்தத்
தேனார் சிமய மலையான் இழி தந்து
நான் மாடக் கூடல் எதிர் கொள்ள, ஆனா
மருந்தாகும் தீநீர் மளதுறைமேய
இருந்தையூர் அமர்ந்த செல்வா! நின்
திருந்தடி தலையுறப் பரவுதும் தொழதே”

Thus, here Koodal Azhagar is referred to as "Irundaiyoor Amarndha Selvan". It is believed that Irundaiyoor is referring to the town where Koodal Azhagar Perumal is seen in an irundha kolam i.e. sitting posture. Koodal Azhagar was also referred to during the sangam period as "Sree irundha valamudaiyar" i.e. person who has the wealth and is seated. In Silappadikaram story Madhavi, a yadhava lady after the Kuravai dance was over, went to the banks of the vaigai river to worship the Perumal there. This incident is referred to in the following words:

ஆயர் முதுமகள் ஆடிய சாயலான்
பூவும் புகையும் புனைசாந்தும் கண்ணியும்
நீடுநீர் வையை நெடுமால் அடியேத்தத்
தூவித துறைபடியப் போயினான்!

These lines say that an elderly lady born in the edayar kulam i.e. yadhava community, after performing the kuravai dance, took flowers, dhoop, and chandanam and went to the temple situated on the banks of the vaigai river and offered it at the feet of the Perumal there, singing the praises of that Perumal.

Another important incident that occurred in this place is connected with the life history of Perialwar. The story has been repeated in the chapter dealing with Srivilliputtur. To briefly recapitulate, the Pandya king by name Sri Vallabha Devan wanted to know which was the best method for attainment of salvation. He sought the advise of his ministers. One of his spiritual teachers was Selva Nambi. Koodal Azhagar appeared in the dream of Selva Nambi and advised him to invite Perialwar from Srivilliputtur for a mahasabha to be convened for discussing the best philosophy and methods that would ensure attainment of salvation. Accordingly, Selva Nambi invited Perialwar. At about the same time, Perialwar also had a dream when he was ordered by Perumal to attend the vidvathsadas. Accordingly the Alwar came to Madurai and in the sabha many religious leaders participated and in that sadas Perialwar was able to easily convince the people about the basic truth in Vaishnavite philosophy and established that Narayana was the Supreme Being. The Pandya king praised him and a bag in which the prize amount consisting of precious stones and jewels etc., was kept, came down and landed in the hands of Perialwar. Vallabha Devan immediately requested that Alwar make him his student and the Pandya king wanted to honour Perialwar. He seated him on an elephant and took him in a procession round the streets of the Madurai City. The king himself was fanning the Alwar with the chamaram. The procession and the divine sight is described as below:

பூதமோர் ஐந்துமேத்தப் புரையறு மறங்க ளேத்த
வேதமோர் நான்குமேத்த விண்ணவர் குழாங்களேத்த
ஓது மூ வலகுமேத்த ஒங்கிரு சுடருமேத்த
மூதறிவுடைய மன்னன் சேனைகள் முழுதுமேத்த

அந்தணர் குழாங்களேத்த அருமுனிக் கணங்களேத்தப்
பந்தணை விரல்சேர் செங்கைப் பாவையர் வீதிதோறுஞ்
சந்தனக் குழம்பு சுண்ணம் தாதவிழ் மலர்கள் சிந்தி
இந்திர விழாவதென்ன கிறைத்தனர் மணியும் பொன்-
னும்

These lines convey the following meaning. They describe in detail the victorious procession of Perialwar, after he won the contest in the vidvat sabha. It says, that when the procession proceeded in the streets of Madurai the pancha boothangal i.e. the five elements viz. water, air, fire, earth and sky, dharma as well as the four vedas, the three worlds viz. Bhoolokam, Swargalokam and Pathalalokam, the Sun and the Moon Gods, the sages, the king and his army, all followed Perialwar and sang his praises. Besides, hosts of brahmins, rishis and dancers whose hands were red in colour due to their constantly handling the ball with which they were playing, followed the procession. Besides, all the streets and the bylanes were strewn with chandanam and other scented powder, flowers, precious stones and gold. The whole procession looked like a festival in the Indra sabha. Such was the grand reception given to Perialwar.

To see this unique and rare sight Koodal Azhagar along with Sridevi and Bhoodevi got on to Garudalwar and appeared before Perialwar. As soon as Perialwar saw the God's presence, he was frightened that in this kaliyuga such a beautiful Perumal may become the envy of the many who had assembled there. He was worried that evil eye may be cast on the Perumal and as a protective measure the Alwar who was sitting on the elephant used the precious stones which was used to decorate the elephant as the cymbals and sang Thiruppallandu. The prize amount given by Sri Vallabhadevan was used by Perialwar for doing construction and renovation work for the Koodal Azhagar temple, Thirumaliruncholai as well as Srivilliputtur temples.

Thirumangai Alwar also once went to Nagapattinam and saw the beautiful Perumal Soundararajan and while doing man-galasasanam to that Perumal compared the beauty of Thiru Nagai Perumal to the Perumal at Uraiyur (Thirukozhi) and the Perumal at Thirukoodal near Madurai.

It is believed that Ramanuja after offering worship at Thirumaliruncholai and fulfilling the vow on behalf of Andal of offering 100 vessels of akkara vadisil and butter and on his way to Srivilliputtur he visited Madurai Koodal Azhagar. He is said to have referred to the place as "Thiruppallandu Vilainda divya desam" i.e. the place where Thiruppallandu blossomed. This is mentioned in the book "Sri Ramanujacharya divya soori charita" written by Pillai Locachariyar.

We learn that Manavala Mamuni also visited this Koodal Azhagar temple twice from what is mentioned in the book "Yatheendra Pravana Prabhavam" written by Pillai Locachariar. The ashtanga vimanam in this temple is a prominent unique feature of this temple. Generally as per the agama sastras the vimanam under which the Perumal resides are of 96 types. The best amongst them is ashtanga vimanam. Such a vimanam is seen in Thirugoshtiyor and Uttara Merur. The vimanam has got eight parts. It is said to signify the eight words in the Ashtakshara mantram. It is regarded as the "sthoola vadivam" i.e. physical representation of the Ashtakshara mahamantram. The vimana has also three tiers. In the first tier we see Perumal in a sitting posture along with the two Thayars. He is referred to as "Mallanda Kindolan" by Perialwar i.e. Perumal with strong majestic shoulders. Thirumangai Alwar refers to Him as "Koodal Koil Konda Kovalar i.e. Person who resides at koodal. The utsava murti is known as Vyuha Sundararajan. The moolavar with one hand is inviting the people to come and seek refuge at His feet and with the other hand is giving abhayam. Hence He is known as "Ahuya varadan" i.e. He invites people and blesses them; in other words it means that He calls people and gives abhayam. The pancha berars and the Chakrattalwar are also seen in this tier.

The Perumal in the 2nd tier is known as Surya Narayana. He is seen in a standing posture with two Thayars. The idols are painted - i.e. "Varnakalapa Thirumeni". These paints are manufactured out of herbs. On the walls of the garbagriha we see beautiful paintings of Agni, Yama, Nirutti, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera, Shiva and Indra etc. along with their vahanams like goat, buffallo, man, makaram, deer, horse, rishabam, elephant.

In the third tier we see God in the lying down posture. He is known as Ksheerabdinadhan. Here also, the God is painted. Around the garbhagriha walls, the dasavatara forms are painted. Brighu and Markandeya are seated on the floor near God. Thus God is seen in all the three poses viz. sitting, standing and lying down pose in this temple.

In the Thayar sannidhi there are musical pillars. It speaks volumes about the architectural and sculptural skills of our ancestors. The Thayar is known as Maduravalli. In the Andal sannidhi the Tiruppavai pictures are drawn.

Yet another unique feature of this temple is a sannidhi for Navagrahams. Usually in a vaishnavite temple there is no sannidhi for navagrahams. It is believed that this sannidhi was built about 100 years ago. Inside the temple there is a Hema theertham. There are beautiful wood carving work in the Vaikunta Ekadasi Unjal mandapam.

Yet another interesting rare feature in this temple is the existence of an unusual icon of Garuda and Hanuman. The way in which Garuda and Hanuman is depicted is very uncommon and at the same time interesting. In vaishnavite worship Peria Thiruvadi viz. Garuda always occupies a prominent place. He is never considered as inferior or subordinate to Hanuman known as Siria Thiruvadi. As the very name signifies Garuda is Peria i.e. big and Hanuman is Siria i.e. small. Actually in Nanguneri Vanamamalai temple there is a sculpture chiselled in the prakara which shows Garuda dancing and Hanuman playing fiddle occupying the secondary place. But in the icon found in Azhagar koil, Hanuman is shown as a bigger piece of art and Garuda is seen with bent knees and hands folded in a very humble posture. The origin of this kind of icon is reported as traceable to the puranic story "Garuda -garva -bangam". For Maharashtrians Hanuman is the great God and may be it is this which influenced the sculptor who sculpted these two pieces. The story relating to the Garuda garva bangam is related in the first volume of the keerthana tharangini the Maharashtra Harikatha in Nagari script published in four volumes. It is said that once when Lord Krishna noticed Garuda had become very

haughty as he was the divine vehicle for Vishnu. So Perumal created a situation which necessitated a duel between Hanuman and Garuda. Garuda was thoroughly defeated. He got scared of Hanuman and ran from God to God seeking protection. Finally he sought refuge at the feet of Krishna, who pitied him. Lord Krishna assumed the form of Pattabhisheka Rama and pacified the angry Hanuman. This icon in the Azhagar koil is said to represent this scene of compromise between Hanuman and Garuda. Hanuman is standing majestically with a half sarcastic smile playing on his lips. Garuda is seen kneeling down by his side in a very humble apologetic pose with hands folded as if he is asking to be excused for his earlier haughtiness. The bronze image of Garuda is seen as a beautiful male figure with a pair of wings. He is kneeling on both the legs. He is seen wearing ornaments of serpents and sarpa kundalam. This, the iconographic experts say, 'is at variance with the way normally Garuda should be shown viz. kneeling his left knee and the crown should be adorned with snakes and body like that of a human being, nose raised and pointed prominently and two hands in anjali. Similarly, the iconographic experts say that Hanuman is not modelled in the conventional manner in this place. He is shown as a well developed youth with yagnopaveetha and other ornaments. The only garment he is wearing is a waist band. He is seen standing at great ease. His right hand touching the wounded mouth of Garuda, his left hand is holding the upper garment that apparently got loosened during the fight. He has a monkey's face. His ears are also like that of a monkey. Unlike the usual images of Hanuman, five jatas are falling down from the head to his neck. This feature looks like the jatas on the image of Nataraja. Yet another peculiar feature noticed on the bronze image of Hanuman is the existence of the Srivatsa mark. This Srivatsa mark is a small triangular symbol on the right chest. This is usually seen only on the images of Vishnu or His avatars. But sometimes such a peculiar curl of hair is seen on an animal especially a horse and it is also called as Srivatsa. Perhaps, the sculptor while sculpting this icon might have marked it on the chest of Hanuman as an indication of the auspicious nature. In this icon of Hanuman also he is depicted as a stalwart with well developed body and limbs full of energy. The image is cast in pancha loham i.e. an amalgam of

five metals. The Hanuman image is ten inches high including the pedestal. In height the Garuda is just half the height of Hanuman. It is said that a similar image is seen in one of the pillars in front of the Udaiyavar shrine in Sriperumbudur in Chengalput District. But there, Hanuman is depicted with his usual crown (Kereeta) and human ears and has only two hands. One hand there is placed on Garuda kneeling by his side and the other hand is hanging down freely. The peculiar image of Garuda and Hanuman described in detail in the above paras is a feature which should not be missed in the Azhagar temple because of its rare combination.

Hymnology:

Thirumazhisai Alwar and Thirumangai Alwar have sung two pasurams each in praise of Lord, here. Those two pasurams along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Thirumazhisai Alwar:-

Nanmugan Thiruvandaadhi - 39th pasuram:-

அழைப்பன் திருவேங்கடத் தானைக் காண
இழைப்பன் திருக்கூடல் கூட - மழைப்பே
ரருவி மணி வரன்றி வந்திழிய-யானை
வெருவி அரவு ஓடுங்கும் வெற்பு.

Meaning:-

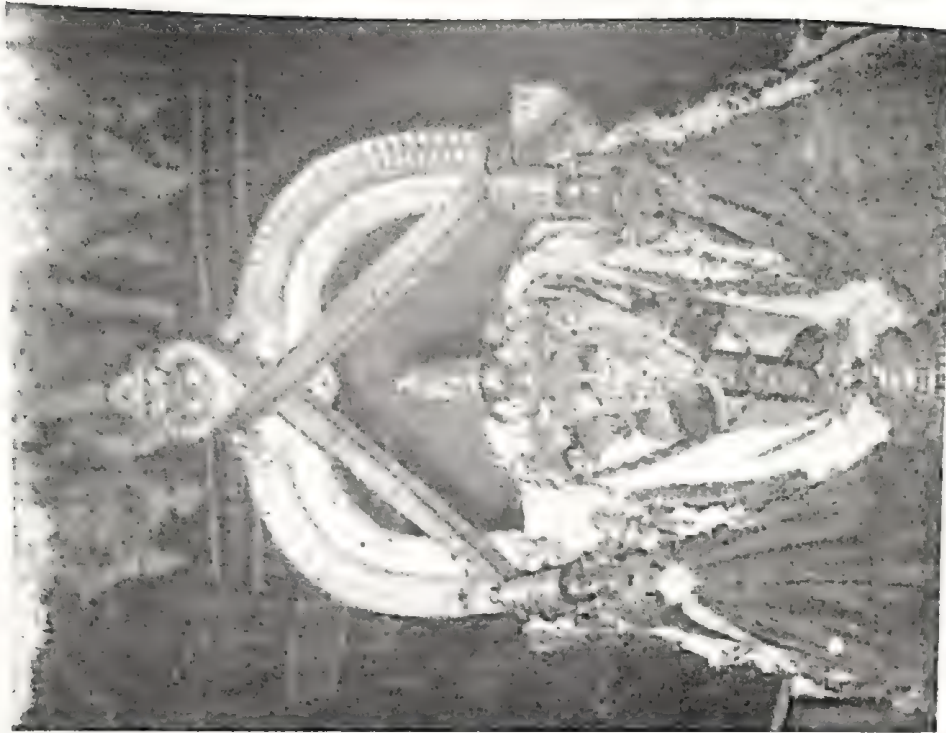
I am giving the clarion call to you to come and see the Lord of Thiruvenkadam and Thirukoodal. The torrential waters cascading down from the waterfalls there have in their flow gathered a huge haul of precious red ruby stones. Seeing that red dazzling colour the elephants are standing in stunned silence, mistaking it for the glow of fire. Thinking it is lightning the venomous snakes, out of fear, have holed themselves in their ant hills.



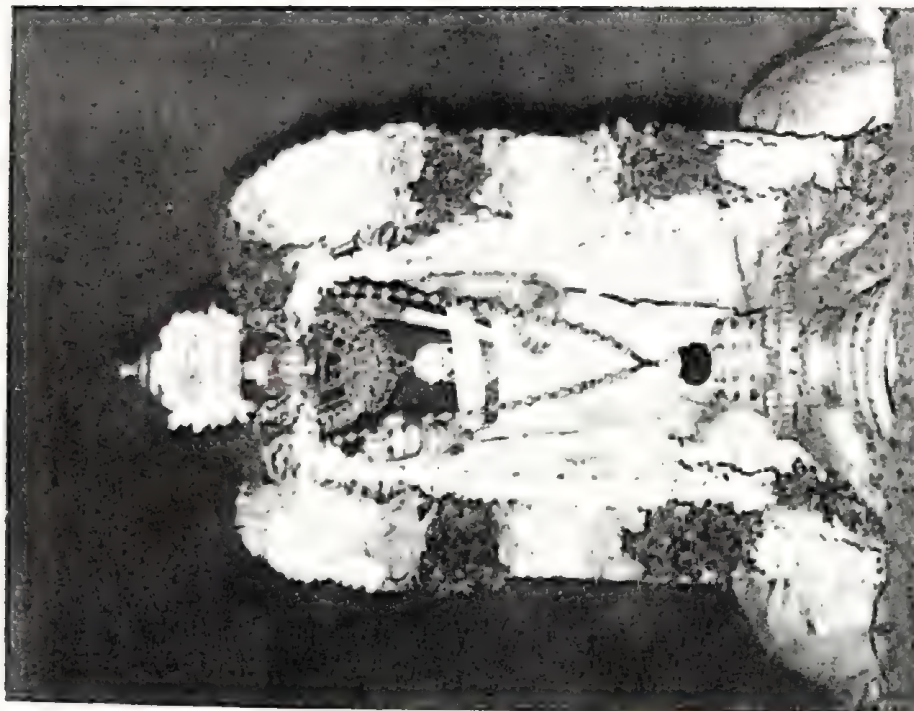
Koodal Azhagar Moolavar



A view of the temple Tower



Utsavamoorthi



Koodal Azhagar Utsavar

Thirumangai Alwar:-

Peria Thirumozhi (9-2-5):-

கோழியும் கூடலும் கோயில் கொண்ட கோவல..
 ரேஓப்பர், குன்ற மன்ன
 பாழியந் தோளும் ஓர் நான்கு டையர் பண்டு
 இவர் தம்மையும் கண்ட றியோம்
 வாழிய ரோஇவர் வண்ணம் எண்ணில் மாகடல்
 போன்றுளர், கையில் வெய்ய
 அழியொன் றேந்திஓர் சங்கு பற்றி அச்சோ
 ஒருவ ரழகி யவா!

Meaning:-

He who has chosen to stay at Uraiyur (Thiru kozhi)
 and Madurai (Koodal) is a veritable king;

His four shoulders are majestic tall and strong like a moun-
 tain; I have not seen Him earlier,

Wonder of wonders, that ocean-hued Lord holding the
 beautiful conch and chakra in His two hands is coming towards
 us.

**Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupati An-
 daadhi:**

வாழ்விப்பான் எண்ணமோ? வல் வினையில் இள்ளம்
 எனை.
 ஆழ்விப்பான் எண்ணமோ? அரிது உரையாய்-
 தீர்ழ்வுஇலாப்
 பாடல் அழகு ஆர்புதுவைப் பட்டர்பிரான்
 கொண்டாடும்
 கூடல் அழகா! - நின் குறிப்பு.

Meaning:-

Oh koodal Azhagar Perumal of Thirukoodal (also known as Then Madurai) a place about whose fame Perialwar of Sriviliputtur composer of the excellent Pallandu pasurams has sung Do you have any intentions to bless me with moksha or do you intend to make me go through some more of the rigors of life both the good (happiness) and the evils (sorrows). As yet I do not know what are your intentions. I am in suspense.

* * *

THIRUGOSHTIYUR

This is a Pandya Nadu divya desam situated in Pasumpon District in Tamil Nadu. It is about 70 kms. away from Madurai, roughly about an hour's drive from Madurai. It is 12 miles from Tirupathur near Karaikudi. This divya desam is popularly known as Sowmya Narayana Perumal temple. It is famous for the Ashtanga divya vimanam (eight towered edifice). This vimanam is of architectural excellence. It has three floors where Perumal can be seen in three different postures/poses. This place has a hoary tradition and has association with the ancient dynasties as is evident from the inscriptions on the temple walls, which speak about the royal patronage that this temple enjoyed from many people like the Raja of Kasi, King Puroorvas, King Krishnadevarayar, a host of Pallava, Chera, Chola and Pandya kings.

It was at this place that the sangam poet Kottiyur Nalandaiyar was born. The other celebrated sangam period poet Kaniyan Poongunran was also born at Mahipalanpatti which is very close to Thirugoshtiyur. He was the famous poet who declared "Yadhum Oore Yavarum Kaeleer"

“யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்”

i.e. the whole world is my country and every human being is my relative. It was at Thirugoshtiyur that Panditha Mani Kadiresan Chettiar, another great literary figure of the recent times was born. Thiruvadavoor which is also close to Thirugoshtiyur is the place where the famous sangam poet Kapilar and the great saivite saint Manickavasagar were born. It was in this divya desam that the poet laureate Selva Nambi of the Pandya King Sri Maran Sri Vallaban lived. It was an equally great descendent of Selva Nambi, known as Thirugoshtiyur Nambi who was the preceptor for the great vaishnavite Acharya Ramanuja. It was at this place that the sacred meaning of the Ashtakshara mantra was passed on by Thirugoshtiyur Nambi to Ramanuja and by the latter to others. This divya desam is the place where during the times of the Pandyan King Srimaran

Srivallabhan a religious debate was organised at Madurai in order to decide which amongst the two religious philosophies was greater i.e. Vaishnavism or Saivism? It was during that contest Perialwar of Srivilliputtur won the day for Vaishnavism. The story as to how he attended the court at Madurai based on the divine instruction given to him in a dream and how he won the prize money and used it for renovating the mandapam etc., in the Vatapatrasayee temple at Srivilliputtur has been already related in the chapter dealing with the Srivilliputtur divya desam.

As stated earlier, the Ashtanga vimanam is a unique piece of architecture of this place. Such vimanams are rarely found. Besides the one at Thirugoshtiyur, similar Ashtanga vimanas are seen at Koodal Azhagar temple at Madurai and at the Vaikunta Perumal temple at Kancheepuram and at the Thirupporur temple. The vimanams at other places are only Thridhala i.e. they have only three storeys. The vimanam at Thirugoshtiyur satisfies all the requirements of an Ashtanga vimanam and has eight separate vimanas, two each on its four sides. Perumal is seen in five different poses in five shrines in this temple. These forms are the usual three poses viz. Ninran (standing), Kidanthan (sayana), Irundan (sitting). The other additional two forms are when He is seen as dancing Krishna (Koothadum Perumal) and as walking (Nadamadum Perumal) Narasimha Perumal. It is believed that this ashtanga vimana was sculpted by the two divine sculptors viz. Visvakarma and Mayan. The golden kalasam on the top of the Ashtanga vimanam is 5' feet height with a circumference of about 6.75' feet. Like the equally big kalasam on the top of the Big temple of Tanjore the shadow of the vimanam never falls on the ground. This is an architectural marvel which speaks highly of the engineering skills of our predecessors. The eight small vimanams on four sides depict the Ashtaksharam (Om Namo Narayana). Some believe that the Ashtanga vimana looks like a standing Garuda bird with its hands folded. Garuda as is well known is the divine vehicle of Perumal.

The vimana as stated earlier, has three tiers. First tier is known as Vaikuntam or Tirupparkadal. Here the Moolavar is known as "Uruga Mellanaiyan". This is the word used by Perial-

war while doing mangalasasanam to the Moolavar. In Sanskrit he is known as "Pannaga Mirudu Sarpasayee". He is seen in a sayana pose lying down on Adishesha. Sridevi and Bhoomi Devi are seated near His feet. Perumal is seen in His ksheerabdhi sayana nadha Thirukolam (pose). In the garbagriha near the feet of Perumal are seen Madhu Kaitapa, the asuras, Devendra, King Purooravas and the Kasi Raja. Kadamba Rishi is seen seated near the head of the Perumal as if he is offering Nitya-seva to Perumal. While Perumal is in His sayana thirukkolam His right hand is in a pose as if He is conferring abhayam to Adishesha. The utsavamurthi is also in this tier. He is known as Sowmya Narayanan, as also Madhava. Thirumangai Alwar while doing mangalasaasanam to this utsavamurthi addressed Him as "Velliyan", "Kariyan", "Thirumagalukku Iniyan" (loved one of Sridevi) and as Kula Ma Magalukku Iniyan (i.e. loved one of Neela Devi) and as Nila Ma Magalukku Iniyan (i.e. Loved one of Bhoomidevi). The Thirumanjana murthi is also in this garbagriha. Thirumangai Alwar addressed this Thirumanjana murthi as "Deva Devapiran" in his mangalasasana pasuram. The Bali Berar who is the nityotsavar was addressed by Perialwar in his mangalasasana pasurams as "Kulirndhu uraikinra Govindan". The 5th berar amongst the Pancha berar in this garbagriha is the Yoga berar i.e. Velvi Murthi. Perialwar referred to him as "Naraka Nasan" in his pasuram.

The second tier is known as Indra lokam. Here one sees Perumal along with Sri Devi and Bhoomi Devi in the standing pose. He is known as Upendra Narayana. Perumal is also known as Ninra Nambi, Ninra Narayana.

The third floor is known as Parama padam. Here the Perumal is known as Para Vasudeva as also Paramapadanathan. He has Sridevi and Bhodevi on either side. He is seen in a sitting posture. On the three walls of the garbagriha there are paintings of nityasuris and other great rishis who have attained mukthi. In the Gopura vasal in front of this garbagriha there is a painting which explains how the souls of all those who breathe their last in this town attain moksha. The picture represent that as soon as one attains mukthi, the Thamogunam dies. The soul is then lifted by the Devas, seated on a vimana, taken to Viraja

nadhi. The soul then has a dip in Viraja nadhi. Immediately, the rajo gunam also disappears. So the soul with just the satva guna reaches Vaikuntam. Its identity (sookshma Roopa) is lost and it attains a form similar to that of Nityasuris. It is believed that those who reside with Paramapada nadha in Paramapadam lose their separate identity and separate thinking powers. They are there as replicas of Perumal Himself waiting to do kainkaryam to Perumal and do whatever job is assigned to them by Him.

Let us again turn to the sthala purana of this divya desam. There are three different theories regarding the origin of this name Thirugoshtiyur. It is a combination of three words - Thirukku + Otti + Oor. It means this is the place that helps one to get rid of all the sins. Another meaning for this name is that it is Thiru + Kottam. Kottam means temple. The name therefore means that it is a place which has a beautiful temple. Yet another origin is the word Thiru + Goshti + Ooor. It means that in this town the wise sages assembled (vidvath goshti). It also means that this was the place where all the Devas including Thirumoorthis met in a group (ghosti) to discuss the means to kill the demon Hiranyakasipu. Hence this place came to be known as Ghostipura or Thiru Ghoshityur. Even today as proof that this was the place where Hiranya vadha was planned, there are sculptures in the temple depicting the killing of the demon Hiranyakasipu. As further proof that Siva, Brahma and Vishnu met here, the moment one crosses the Mani vasal in front of the Ashtanga vimanam there is a temple for Sarbeswaran. The lingam here is believed to be a swayambu linga.

According to the puranas on the banks of Mani Muktha river was the ashram of Saint Kadhamba. He was doing penance in his hermitage in Kadhamba forest. It was the only place which was safe and secure to the devas and yogis. It was known as Dharmapuri. At that time, an asura by name Hiranyasura was causing untold misery and mischief in the rest of the world. The devas and yogis could not carry on their tapas or perform their yagas or their acts of charity (Dharma) without being troubled by this asura. Unable to bear Hiranyasura's atrocities, the devas approached Sriman Narayana and sought protection. Narayana assured them protection. He came down to the world, met at

Kadhamba rishi's hermitage, as that was the only place which was inaccessible and impenetrable by Hiranyasura. At that asram Narayana as well as Brahma and all the devas met. They had a discussion as to the steps that are to be taken to get rid of the demon. The demon had earlier obtained a boon that his death would never be caused either by a man or by an animal or any weapon, outside or inside the house. After the discussion, Sriman Narayana decided to take the avatar i.e. incarnation as Narasimha, having the body of a human being and the head of a lion. As the demon could not be killed by any ordinary weapon, Perumal decided to kill him with his nails. As he could not be killed either inside a house or outside a house, He decided to kill the asura by placing him on His lap near the threshold of a house and tear open the chest and thus put an end to the evil demon. This asura vadha took place at Ahobilam. However, Kadhamba rishi at Goshtiyur requested Sriman Narayana to give him darshan in the form in which he killed Hiranyasura. Thus Sriman Narayana after the destruction of Hiranyasura gave darsan to Sage Kadhamba, Indra, Brahma and Rudra and all the 33 crores of devas at Thirugoshtiyur. In response to the request made by saint Kadhamba, Perumal agreed to stay on in His archa form in the same place to enable the innumerable devotees to worship Him and seek salvation. It is believed that the utsava vigraham in this place was brought by Indra and given to Kadhamba Maharishi. Indra also conducted the radha utsavam in the month of Chithirai.

As Perumal was in the middle of all the devas who met at this place and took the democratic decision to destroy Hiranyasura, Perumal is known as Stitha Narayanan. As He is lying down on Adishesha, He is also known as Pannaga Sayana. The two idols of Lord Narasimha in this temple are also unique. These idols are seen outside the Paramapada vasal in the Northern prakara. In one idol of Narasimha. He is depicted as fighting with Hiranyan. In the other idol Narasimha is seen slaying Hiranyan. Both the idols are terrifying. It is said that the same scene is brought out in an aesthetically attractive manner in the famous Ellora caves. But here the sculptures are realistically horrifying. These idols were once housed in Ramar Sannidhi and in Narasimhar Sannidhi. But as people were terrified with

the feelings depicted so realistically in the idols, they were removed and kept outside the Paramapada Vasal. Later a British Collector had two Mandapams specially built for housing these artistic excellent pieces. It is in that Mandapam that we now see these two idols of Narasimha.

To continue with the Sthala Purana, one day King Puroorvasu was going to Ganga, in his vimana, to have his bath. Due to some inexplicable force even as his chariot flew over the hermitage of Kadhamba rishi, it stopped and would not move. In order to find out what was causing the obstruction, Puroorvasu landed on earth. He met Kadhamba muni. He saw the ashtanga vimanam. He was wonder struck at the beauty of the vimanam. Kadhamba muni then requested him to bring 1500 bhaghavata families from Kasi to live in this area and perform regular pooja to Perumal. Puroorvasu promised to do the same. He went to the banks of Ganga and assembled 1500 bhaghavata families, brought them along with him, built houses for them. Thus came into existence the holy town of Thirugoshtiyur.

Later there was a king by name "Puñyanidhi" belonging to Chandra vamsam. While on a pilgrimage he visited this kshetra. He worshipped Goshtinatha and then undertook construction work to beautify the vimana, renovated the temple towers, built a mandapa to celebrate the utsavs like Brahmotsava etc.

Having covered the sthalapurana of Thirugoshtiyur, let us now turn to a few significant features associated with this divya desam. As stated earlier, this divya desam is the birth place of Selva Nambi, as also Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. Selva Nambi was a great scholar. Perialwar used to visit this place quite often. On one of his visits he met Selva Nambi whom he mentions many times in his Pasurams. On one such occasion it was the Sri Jayanthi day. The great scholar Bhakta and the King Srivallabha Pandya decided to visualise this town as Mathura the birth place of Krishna and celebrate it with festivities as it would have been done at Gokulam. Perialwar then composed in beautiful Tamil a string of pasurams which describes the greatness of Nandagopa. Even now they form part of the Divyaprabandam.

This place is equally famous as the birth place of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. He was the Guru of the great reformer and saint Ramanuja. It is said that Ramanuja came 18 times to this divya desam in order to be initiated by Thirughoshtiyur Nambi into the inner meaning of Ashtakshra Mantra. It is said that on the 18th occasion Thirughoshtiyur Nambi explained the Mantra on condition that Ramanuja would not publicise the Mantra. But as soon as Ramanuja learnt the Mantra, he found it to be so efficacious and beautiful that he could not but have a compelling desire to share the beauty of that Mantra with all the people in that town. He went up to the temple Vimana, called all the people to assemble there and from the top of the Vimana pronounced loudly the sacred Mantra and asked them to repeat the same and ensure salvation. On hearing this, Thirughoshtiyur Nambi was annoyed. He sent for Ramanuja and told him in no unmistakable terms that he had broken the promise given to him and will have to suffer for that sin. He said this sacrilegious act deserved sending him to eternal hell. He wanted to know the reason as to why Ramanuja broke his word. Ramanuja replied that he was prepared to go to eternal perdition, for the sake of the millions who would be saved by learning the Mantra. As soon as Thirughoshtiyur Nambi heard these words from Ramanuja, he realised his own narrowness and smallness, as also the supreme magnanimity of Ramanuja. He immediately embraced Ramanuja and called him Emberumanar (my God). This henceforth became the name by which Ramanuja was known throughout the country. Even today we find two fine bronzes of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi and Ramanuja side by side in this temple. The house where Thirughoshtiyur Nambi lived is pointed out to visitors even now. The place in the Vimana from where Ramanuja loudly proclaimed the sacred Mantra is shown to the visitors even today. There is an image of Ramanuja at that spot to mark the holy sacred spot.

Yet another incident which is very touching relates again to the life of Ramanuja and Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. It is said that one day Ramanuja was going round the streets of Thirughoshtiyur reciting the Tirupavai songs of Andal and seeking biksha from the residents of that place. As he came near the Nambi's house, the daughter of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi,

known as Athuzhai, came out with her jingling bangles and offered biksha to Ramanuja. Ramanuja's mind was so full of Tirupavai that for a minute he mistook Nambi's daughter to be Nappinnai referred to in Tirupavai. He fell prostrate at her feet and addressed Nambi's daughter as Nappinnai, as he saw in her the divine consort of the Perumal. Such was his deep involvement in Tirupavai songs which earned him the title of Tiruppavai Jeeyar.

Another interesting incident again deals with the great bond of love and affection that existed between Guru Thirughoshtiyur Nambi and his disciple Ramanuja. One day Thirughoshtiyur Nambi heard that Ramanuja was likely to be poisoned due to the enmity among his co-students and his then preceptor. Thirughoshtiyur Nambi immediately started to Srirangam. Hearing the arrival of his Guru, Ramanuja and the other sishyas went to the banks of the Cauvery river. The sands were burning hot. Even then he stood firm at that spot. Seeing Nambi, he immediately fell at his feet and would not get up and he waited for Thirughoshtiyur Nambi to give him permission to get up. Nambi was remaining silent. The other sishyas were getting angry wondering as to why Nambi was so cruel as to allow Ramanuja to continue to be in the Sashtanga namaskaram pose, even in the burning sands. One of the sishyas Kidambi Yachan was so upset that he said "Swami your sishya is lying down prostrate before you on the burning sand. His body must be suffering due to the heat. How can I believe that you are having a lot of love and affection to Ramanuja?". Hearing these words uttered in anger, Nambi had a beautiful smile on his lips. He said that his apparent act of callousness had a hidden objective. He said it was a test to see who amongst all the sishyas of Ramanuja would utter a word of protest on his behalf and plead his case. He said his silence was a ruse to test and see who amongst the sishyas would value the life of Ramanuja more than his own life and thus prove his affection and unquestioned loyalty towards Ramanuja. He said he was glad that atleast one sishya had spoken up for Ramanuja. From that day he ordered that Kidambi Yachen alone, shall cook the food for Ramanuja. There was no need for Ramanuja to take biksha and then cook

his food. By this method, Thirughoshtiyur Nambi ensured that there was no possibility of Ramanuja's food being poisoned by his enemies.

Another incident that is repeated in this town again relates to the high regard that Ramanuja had for Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. It is said that on the first occasion when Ramanuja visited Thirughoshtiyur, he did not know the exact location of the house of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. Having reached the town, he asked some people to point out the direction in which Thirughoshtiyur Nambi's house was located. One of them pointed out a house and said that was the house of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. Immediately Ramanuja turned towards the direction of the house of Thirughoshtiyur Nambi. He did not walk towards the house. On the other hand, he would bow down, offer salutations doing sashtanga namaskaram for each step and then only proceed to the next step. The people in the town wondered as to why he was doing this. He explained to them the greatness of Nambi.

Thirughoshtiyur is also known as the place in Pandya Nadu where the democratic principles and egalitarian concepts of vaishnavism were proclaiming and practiced. Ramanuja was the first religious reformer and a great vaishnavite savant who released religion from the fetters of the priesthood. He made the religion reach the populace. Till then it was a language unknown to the common man who practiced it. But it was Ramanuja who took the first decision in this sacred place by going to the top of the temple Vimana and proclaimed to one and all, without any caste or class distinction, the significance and the inner meaning of the Ashtakshra Mantra. Thus, Ramanuja democratised the religion in this place by explaining the inner meaning of Ashtakshra Mantra to all the votaries belonging to all castes and creeds. He cast aside the spirit of caste exclusiveness and any illusion of spiritual superiority of certain select communities. A spirit of sympathy for the lower castes and classes of Hindu society has been from the beginning a distinctive feature of Vaishnavism and the credit goes to Ramanuja who introduced this bold reformation. That is why this city of Thirughoshtiyur becomes important as the place where

Ramanuja took this decision to democratise Vaishnavism. He proclaimed equality of man in the eyes of God.

Yet another incident which proves that the democratic principles were in evidence in this divya desam relates to the manner in which the Devas met in the Ashram of Kadhamba Muni and then discussed and decided the manner in which Hiranyakasipu was to be destroyed. Only after a consensus decision did Perumal take the form of Narasimha to destroy Hiranyakasipu and restore Dharma.

This temple is maintained by the Siva Ganga Devasthanam. The Devasthanam has maintained the temple in its pristine purity. All the superstructures constructed in the past are maintained in their original shape and colour. One has to pass through many narrow passages, highdomed halls and uncut stone steps and then only get on to the top of the vimanam. In some places, one has to even crawl through a narrow passage. We must be thankful to the Devasthanam authorities for not having interfered with the original temple construction. Beautiful sculptures as well as paintings have been preserved in a very excellent manner.

Epigraphical Evidence:-

The temple has many interesting inscriptions dating back to Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagar and Thanjavur Nayak Kings. The Pandya Kings mentioned in it are Kulasekara Pandya, Srivallabadevan, Sundara Pandya, Sadaiyamaran and Vikrama Pandya. Chola Kings like Kulothunga, Rajaraja I and Rajendra are also mentioned in them. Sadasiva Maharayar of Vijayanagar Empire and Ranganatha and Vijayaraghava Nayaks of Thanjavur are the other Kings whose deeds find a place in the inscriptions. The inscription found in a pillar of the Thayar temple dates back to 1162 A.D. and speaks about Veerapandya Marakkal and Kudithangi which were two measurements in vogue at that time. An inscription in Vattezhuthu dates back to the period of Sadayamara Pandya who lived in 765 A.D. and it is about the gift made by a girl, known as Kannikudi, for burning a lamp in the temple. Athreya Sankaranarayana who lived during the rule of Jatavarma Pandya also made some en-

dowments for performing nithya pujas at the Narasimha shrine in this temple. Apparently, Narasimha at that time was known as Kerala Singaperumal.

An inscription on a pillar of the mandapa in front of the Nachiyar shrine in the Sowmiyanarayana Perumal temple at Thirugoshtiyur there is an inscription which relates to the period of the Pandyan king Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulasekharadeva. It records the gift of a village. This inscription is of importance as it mentions a grain measure called "Virapandyan". ¹

On a second pillar in the same mandapa there is an inscription relating to the reign of Rajasekara Varman, the Chola King. It records a gift of 15 kasu by a lady for burning a perpetual lamp in the Kilaitirunilai where God was pleased to take rest in the temple at Thirugoshtiyer. ²

Yet another inscription on the third pillar in the same mandapa records an agreement by the assembly of Chola Pandya Valanadu to burn two perpetual lamps before Chocka Nayanar in the temple at Thirugoshtiyur with three panams realised annually as nattu viniyogam. ³

Yet another inscription on a slab built into the southern wall of the store room records a gift of a perpetual lamp as well as 12 cows and 50 sheeps by individuals for burning another perpetual lamp in the temple. This inscription relates to the period of the Pandyan king Sadayamaran. ⁴

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the store room of the temple registers a sale of land. What is of interest here that the purchaser had to pay the temple annually a certain proportion of the produce. It mentions a measuring rod, kuditangi and a grain measure known as desavattai. ⁵

¹ Ins. No.283 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

² Ins. No.284 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

³ Ins. No.285 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

⁴ Ins. No.287 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

⁵ Ins. No.288 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the store room in the temple relating to the period of Jatavarman the Pandyan king records the remission of taxes on the villages of Andour and Purkuli to provide for the expenses of the festival of Azhagia Manavala in the first floor for nine days beginning with the day of Chitra in Aippigai which was the birthday of the king. ⁶

At the entrance to the northern side of the first prakara in the same temple there is an inscription relating to the Vijayanagara period which records a gift of land for offering to God Sokkanarayana Perumal. ⁷

There are two more inscriptions which record grant of piece of land for meeting the expenses of offerings and worship to the deity. ⁸

Another inscription on the northern wall of the first prakara in the temple relates to the period of the Pandyan king Maravarman Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulasekhara deva. It records the remission of taxes due from the temple servants on their kilvaram right on certain lands which was brought under cultivation in the name of the principal deity of the temple. The melvaram itself was being utilised for offering to the image of Vadagopurattu Nayanar. ⁹

Another inscription relating to the period of the same Pandyan king on the same northern wall records the apportionment of a fourth of the income from certain lands in Avakudi to the steward of the temple. The rest of the produce was to be enjoyed by the temple. ¹⁰

Another inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan king Jatavarman registers a gift of land and money for special offerings and worship to the image of God while seated in the

⁶ Ins. No.291 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

⁷ Ins. No.292 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

⁸ Ins.No.293 & 294 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

⁹ Ins.No. 295 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹⁰ Ins.No. 296 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

mandapa built by the donor on the day of his natal asterism viz. Uthirattadhi in the month of Vaikasi.¹¹

On the southern wall of the first prakara of the temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan King Sundarapandyadeva which record an order of the assembly to the temple authorities to present daily two prasadas (offered food) and betel to the temple manager Srikaryam as an act of appreciation (sanmana) for his having been appointed for the recitation of Tirumozhi before the deity during the 10 days festival in the month of Margazhi.¹¹

There is yet another inscription on a stone slab built into the western and southern walls of the first prakara which records tax free gift of land in certain villages for meeting the expenses of the offerings and worship of the God during the 10 days festival in Margazhi.¹²

On the southern wall of the first prakara in the temple there are a few more inscriptions which record a sale of the village by the temple to a person who agreed to provide for the celebration of the five days vasanthotsavam festival in the month of Rishaba which was his star of birth.¹³

There is also an inscription which says that the above donor should be given part of the prasadam on the five days of the festival and that he could get the lands in the village which he had granted to the temple cultivated by his own people and enjoy the kilvaram of the land himself and pay the melvaram to the temple for the expenses of the festival.¹⁴

Another inscription on the same wall relating to the period of Jatavarman the Pandyan king registers a confiscation of all the properties including the village, houses, garden, male and female servants etc. belonging to a certain person who had killed

¹¹ Ins.No. 297 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹¹ Ins.No. 298 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹² Ins.No. 304 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹³ Ins.No. 299 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹⁴ Ins.No. 300 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

with the help of his armed accomplices one Vamana bhattar while he was returning home from the pooja and escaped being caught. The confiscated property was added to the temple as Tirumanattukkani of the Sokka/Nayanar temple.¹⁵

Another inscription refers to the same incident of the murder and say that the murderer was killed in return and also fixed the rate of taxes due on the confiscated land to be paid to the assembly and to the temple. Apparently this sort of quick justice of someone murdering and the murdered in turn being murdered was in practice even then and was faithfully recorded on the inscriptions.¹⁶

Interestingly another inscriptions mentions the same incident and records the decision of the assembly to return to the original owner all the property which was confiscated for a consideration of 800 pons and certain taxes on the lands to the temple as a result of joint representation of several individuals on behalf of the accused saying that he had no hand in the alleged murder.¹⁷

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the second prakara in the temple registers a gift of land called Vannar vaval to the temple for curd and rice offerings to the God.¹⁸

Another inscription at the entrance of the gopuram on the southern wall of the temple related to the period of the Tanjore Naik king Raghunatha Nayak and records a gift of money by an agent of Raghunatha Naik for meeting the expenses of some festivals in Sankramana and for feeding the brahmanas once a day in the Ramanuja kutam for the merit of his master.¹⁹

Another inscriptions at the entrance of the gopuram on the northern wall relates to the period of the Tanjore Naik king Vijaya Raghunatha Nayak. It records the provision made by

¹⁵ Ins.No. 301 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹⁶ Ins.No. 302 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B

¹⁷ Ins.No. 303 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B.

¹⁸ Ins.No. 307 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B.

¹⁹ Ins.No. 308 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B.

Dalavay Venkatadri Nayakar the agent of the king for the daily offerings during a service in the temple and for feeding in the Ramanuja kutam for the merit of his master. ²⁰

Hymnology:

Perialwar, Bhoothathalwar, Peyalwar, Thirumazhisai alwar and Thirumangai alwar have sung 39 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. A few of such pasurams along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Perialwar:

Thirumozhi (4-4-10):

காசின் வாய் கரம் விற்கிலும் கரவாது மாற்றிலி
 சோறிட்டு
 தேச வார்த்தை படைக்கும் வண் கையினார்கள் வாழ்
 திருக் கோட்டியூர்
 கேசவா! புகுடோத்தமா! கிளர் சோதியாய் குறளா
 வென்று
 பேசுவா ரடியார்கள் எந்தம்மை விற்கவும்
 பெறுவார்களே

Meaning:

Even in difficult times when one handful of grain sells for one kasu, the generous people of Thirugoshtiyur without expecting anything in return are happy to welcome the guests and extend to them all the hospitality.

Such is their great charitable disposition. The devotees there address the God as Oh Kesava, Oh Purushothama, Oh God with unsurpassed lustre; Thus, addressing You by your myriad names they derive great pleasure. I am willing to offer my body and soul to such sincere devotees.

Note:- Here Alwar makes it abundantly clear that God will be mightily pleased even if we sincerely serve His devotees.

²⁰ Ins.No. 309 of ARIE 1923 Appendix B.

Bhuttatalwar:

Irandaam Thiruvandaadhi - 87th pasuram:

இன்று வறிகின்றே ளல்லேன், இருநிலத்தைச்
சென்றுங் களந்த திருவடியை - அன்று
கருக் கோட்டியுள் கிடந்து கைதொழுதேள் கண்டேள்
திருக் கோட்டி எந்தை திறம்.

Meaning:

Even when I was in the womb with the blessing of Perumal I knew the greatness of Perumal of Thirugoshtiyur. After I was born also I spend all my time praising only Him; As such it is not true to say that only today I have come to understand the glory of His divine feet with which as Vamana the diminutive dwarf He measured the worlds. (Alwar here conveys the beautiful thought that if one is not able to understand and accept the glory of God when one is in this world it is as good as not being born. Life is then meaningless, without true content. Once the person knows God he cannot ever forget the only thing that is worth knowing. In Tamil this idea is conveyed by saying

“அன்று நாள் பிறந்திலேன்
பிறந்த பிள் மறந்திலேன்”

Literally translated it means "That day I was not yet born.

After I was born I have not forgotten"

Pei Alwar:-

Moonram Thiruvandaadhi 62nd song:

விண்ணாகரம் வெஃகா விரிதிரை நீர் வேங்கடம்
மண்ணாகரம் மாமட வேளுக்கை - மண்ணகத்த
தெள் குடந்தை தோளார் திருவரங்கம் தெள்கோட்டி
தன் குடங்கை நீரேற்றாள் தாழ்வு.

Meaning:

The places where the Perumal who asked and received the boon (dhana neer) from Mahabali resides are

At Oppilippan sannidhi at Vinnagaram
 At Yadothkari sannidhi at Thiruvehka
 At Thiruvenkatam with copious water supply
 At Kanchi which is like a bhoolaka vaikuntam
 At Velukkai
 At Thirukundanthai
 At honey sweet Srirangam
 At Thirugoshtiyur.

Note:-

In all these places Perumal is known for His easy accessibility (sowlabhya).

(Dhana neer - while giving danam i.e. while making a gift, it is customary to seal the agreement to gift by the donee pouring some water into the hands of the donee. It is God who usually gives. But as Vamanan He had to receive a gift from Mahabali and thus it was given to a mere mortal to pour water from hiskamandalam into the open cupped palms of Perumal as symbolic gesture of fulfilment of His word. It is also believed that one who asks is a brahmin and a brahmachari at that his request should not be negated. That is why Perumal took the avatar as a diminutive brahmin brahmachari and made sure Mahabali doing the yagam will not deny the request.

Thirumazhisai Alwar:

(Nanmugan Thiruvandaadhi 34th song):

குறிப் பெளக்குக் கோட்டியூர் மேயானை ஏத்த
 குறிப் பெளக்கு நன்மை பயக்க - வெறுப்பனோ
 வேங்கடத்து மேயானை மெய்வினை நோய் எய்தாமல்
 தான் கடத்தும் தன்மையான் தான்.

Meaning:

I always worship the Perumal at Thirugoshtiyur for my welfare. Can I ever forget those divine feet which are the sure saviours (kavacha) to ward off the ills of this worldly life i.e. samsara?.

Thirumangai Alwar:

Peria Thirumozhi (9-10-7):

கன்று கொண்டு விளங்கனி யெறிந்து, ஆநிரைக்கு
அழிவென்று மாமழை
நின்று காத்து கந்தான் நிலமா மகட்கு இனியான்
குன்றின் முல்லையின் வாசமும் குளிர் மல்லிகை
மணமும் அளைந்து இளந்
தென்றல் வந்துலவும் திருக் கோட்டியூரானே.

Krishna the Perumal who threw the calf (which was in reality Vatsasuran, the demon) on the wood apple tree (which was in reality Kapithasura, the demon) and thereby destroyed the two demons in one shot -

Who lifted the Govardhana giri and held it aloft as an umbrella so that favourite of Bhoodevi - such on the cattle could be saved from the fury of the lashing rains -

Who is the favou Almighty is at Thirugoshtiyur where a gentle breeze wafts after collecting the heady fragrance of the scented jasmine flowers.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Andaadhi:

வான் பார்க்கும் பைங்கூழ் போல் வானா வுனதருலே
யான் பார்க்க நீ பார்த்து இரங்கினாய்-தேன் பார்ப்பின்
ஓசைத் திருக் கோட்டியூரானே! இன்னமும் என்
ஆசைத் திருக்கு ஒட்டியாள்.

Meaning:

Oh Lord of Thirugoshtiyur full of young bees sucking honey and humming with joy, You have showered your grace on me. I look forward to your relieving me of wordly attachments even as

the rainfed crops eagerly await the life giving heavenly showers for their very survival sustenance and growth.

(Kulasekhara Alwar reflects these very thoughts when he says

“எத்தனையும் வாள் மறந்த காலத்தும்
பைங்கூழ்கள் மைத்தெழுந்த மாமுகிலே
பார்த்திருக்கும்.”

* * *

THIRUCHEERI VARAMANGAI NANGUNERI - THOTHADRI

This divya desam is more popularly known as Vanamamalai as also Thothadri Kshetram. It lies in the Tirunelveli-Thirukkurungudi bus route. The moolavar is known as Thothadri nathan. He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. The utsavar is known as Deivanayakan, with the two thayars on either side. The other Nachiyar is known as Seerivaramangai thayar. The theertham is Indra theertham and Chetru Thamarai Theertham. The vimanam is Nandavarthana Vimanam. God appeared to Brahma, Indra, Romasamuni, Brighu and Markandeya rishi. As stated in earlier chapter Perumal is residing in this earthly world in many holy places to enable His devotees to worship Him with ease. These holy places are of four kinds viz., Swayam vyaktha kshetram, Deiva kshetram, Aarsham kshetram and Manusha kshetram. The Swayam vyaktha kshetram are those where the Almighty God with His boundless compassion revealed Himself to give darshan to people. In India, there are eight such swayam vyaktha kshetrams. They are Badri kasramam, Salagramam, Naimisaraynam, Pushkkaran, Tirumalai Srirangam, Srimushnam and finally Thothadri i.e. Vanamamalai. The story relating to this kshetra is related in Brahmanda purana covering nearly 16 chapters.

Let us now turn to the various stories connected with this holy place viz., Thothadri. Sootha Puranikar is said to have related these stories to the sages in Naimisaranya. He said that originally sage Narada wanted to know which was the best theertham. He went to Kailasa, the abode of Lord Siva. He praised Lord Siva with the Rudra mantra. Then he asked Siva, the greatest Vishnu Baktha to relate to him the greatness and the glory of the holiest kshetra on earth. Lord Rudra said to have related this story to Parvathi, then Saraswati who in turn related it to Vyasa and from Vyasa Maharishi Sootha Puranikar heard this story. Thothadri is located to the south of tamarabarani river. It is believed that Thirupparkadal the ocean of milk itself has manifested as Chetru Thamarai theertham in this place. The town came to be known as Vallimangai. It is believed to be Vaikuntam i.e. the abode of Vishnu itself. To the south of this

holy place the Koorma mountain is seen. The Palar river also flows near the temple. The sand at Thothadri is held in equal regard as those of Saligrama. It is believed that this is a very holy divya desam and persons having connection with this divya desam in either one of the four ways of bakthi viz. darshan (seeing), smarana (thinking), Vasa (dwelling) and Keerthana (singing) will get salvation viz., moksha.

Let us first relate the greatness and glory of Chetru Thamarai. Once upon a time, there was a king who was very pious. Many wild animals caused a lot of trouble to the people by damaging their property. The hunters came and complained to the King and asked him to arrange to get rid of the animals. The king agreed to help them. He set out a hunting. His armies also followed him. He killed many wild pigs, buffaloes, tigers, wild bulls, also elephants etc. Once he sighted a spotted deer having eight legs. He chased it on his horse. But to his disappointment, the deer suddenly disappeared. The king was very tired, hungry and thirsty. He tried to return to his town. Enroute he saw a parnasala in the forest. He got down from his horse, went to the ashram to beg for food from the sage living there. But he found none in the paranasala, but he saw good food placed on a leaf. There was also water nearby, perhaps, as offering to God. He wondered whether this was an illusion caused by some demons trying to cheat him. He was patient and stayed quietly for some time without touching either the food or the water. He thought that if the food belonged to a sage, he might curse him if he partook of the meal without his permission. Actually the hermitage belonged to Kussasana, the son of Kalava rishi. He had gone to the river to perform the mid day rites. After his tapas, he returned to the asram. But meantime, unable to bear the pangs of hunger the king had eaten the food. When the rishi came with his kamandala of water and basil leaves, he saw this sacriligious act. He was angry. He cursed the King for having eaten the food meant to be offered first to Lord Vishnu and then to be eaten. He cursed that the food consumed by the King should become poisonous and that the water drunk by the king should become an intoxicating drink. He further added that as the king had partaken of a food which had not been offered to Lord Vishnu, he would go to hell. He cursed that the

king should become a dog and wander about to atone for his sinful act. On hearing this the king was very sad. He fell at the feet of the rishi and sought forgiveness. The sage would not relent. The king asked the rishi the manner in which he could atone for his sin and as to when he would be relieved of his curse. The rishi said that he would be freed from the curse at an important holy place. He asked him to wander about the divya kshetrams and in some place, sometime, he would be relieved of his curse. The king became a dog and was roaming about the forests. Once a magician was coming through the wild woods. He saw the dog. He felt that the dog could be trained by him to play some tricks and thus help in earning his livelihood. Thus, the magician took the dog. He went to the Chola kingdom and along with his dog amused the kings with the tricks that he had taught his dog. Then he went to Chera Nadu. Later he reached Pandya Nadu. One day he entered a thick groove. In the centre of the groove was the holy theertha known as Chetru thamarai. There were plenty of lotuses and lillies in the tank. The man and the dog had their bath in the tank and drank its water. What a wonder-immediately the dog got transformed into the king i.e. his original form. The curse was redeemed. The erstwhile dog related its story to the magician. The dog turned into the king, out of gratitude took the magician also to his erstwhile kingdom. Thus, Chetru Thamarai pushkarini enabled the king cursed by Kusasana to atone for his sin and regain his original form and wealth.

Yet another story connected with this holy place explains how Lord Vishnu appeared before Bhoomi devi and blessed her. It is said that Lord Narayana, after His yoga nidra, decided to create the world. Then the sweet smelling lotus flower, bloomed from his navel. Brahma was seated on this flower. Lord Narayana had entrusted the job of creating the world to Brahma. He repeated the vedas and entrusted it to Lord Brahma for safe keeping. But one day, due to his carelessness, Madhu kaitapa rakshasas stole the vedas from Brahma. Narayana had to fight with them. He killed them and rescued the vedas. But mother earth felt that the very existence of the two rakshasas Madhu kaitapa had polluted her. She therefore went to Mahendra mountain near Thothadri and did severe penance to purify

herself. It is said that she had her bath regularly in the Chetru Thamarai pushkarini. She used to stand in the midst of Panchagni. She controlled her breath and sought success through the yogic way. In autumn, she used to stand in water on one leg and continued her severe penance. After a long time as a reward for the severe penance, Lord Vishnu appeared before her. The Goddess was happy. She confessed to Vishnu that she felt that she had lost her purity owing to the existence of the daityas viz., Madhu and Kaitapa. She requested God to purify her from that pollution. Kesava blessed her. He said that henceforth Goddess Earth will also be known as "Methini". In response to the request of Bhoomi devi, Lord Vishnu agreed to continue to stay in the same place and give darshan to other sincere devotees. It is said that from that time as in Vaikunta, Lord Vishnu is seated with Sridevi and Bhodevi at Thothadri also and gives His darshan to all devotees.

It is said that one day Lord Siva was explaining in great detail to Parvathi the greatness and glory of Thothadri and how even the gravest of sins viz., pancha maha pathakam will be absolved if one resides at Thothadri. Lord Siva then told her yet another story connected with this place.

Once upon a time, Anantha and a brahmin by name Kalava were doing penance in a forest seeking Lord Narayana. Mahavishnu appeared before those sages and blessed them. Mahavishnu then went to Padma Pushkarini on the banks of Kumbakonam and wanted to bless Kalava and also release him from his severe penance. At that time, Kalava Maharishi requested that in his asram Anantha, the King of Serpents who had come from the Naga country was also doing tapas. He wanted his desire also to be fulfilled. In response to the request of Kalava Maharishi God promised to stay on in the same place. He agreed that henceforth the place will be known as Srinivasa Kshetram. Anantha prayed to the Lord to bless him and enable him to be with Lord Vishnu. Vishnu granted that request also and lay down on Anantha.

Yet another story connected with this place mentions as to how God appeared before Brighu maharishi. Once Brighu

maharishi had cursed Lord Vishnu. To atone for that sin, Brighu did penance at Thothadri. Pleased with his penance, God appeared before him seated on Garuda. Brighu then requested that Goddess Mahalakshmi devi be born as his daughter, and that Perumal should become his son-in-law. God granted his request. Hence Lakshmi devi was born to Brighu. In due course Lord Vishnu came and married her and it is believed that Vishnu as well as Lakshmi are living at Thothadri and fulfilling the promise given to Brighu maharishi. Brighu was later given salvation.

Another story explains how Urvasi and Thilottama, the celestial damsels, attained sameepya praptham i.e. staying close to Perumal in this divya desam. Brahma while creating the whole world created Yakshas, Gandharvas, as also divine women. One such beautiful divine damsel was known as Urvasi. She always used to disturb the penance of persons who wanted to attain Indra padavi i.e. post of Indra. She interrupted the penance of Visvamisra also once. Her music and dance are incomparable. Once she came to Satya loka and sang in the presence of Brahma. Indra and other devas were engrossed in her music. Another damsel by name Thilottama came there. She sang in tune with the veena. Immediately, Urvasi became jealous. She asked as to how Thilottama could have the audacity to sing in tune with the veena played by her. She listed out her great achievements in spoiling the penance of various sages to help the devas. What is the damage you can cause, asked Urvasi of Thilottama? Thilottama replied that she came to Satya loka due to Maka snana viratham i.e. bathing in the holy tank throughout the month of Maka i.e. 11th Tamil month. She lived in Satya loka while Urvasi lived in swarga loka. She held that swarga loka was believed to be inferior to Satya loka in truthfulness. She said that the people living in Swarga loka, when they exhaust their punya will have to take birth again in the mortal world and take the cycle of birth death and rebirth. Except for the winking of the eyes there was no difference between the devas and the mortals. She therefore felt that Urvasi who lived in Swarga loka was not so great. Thilottama then related the story as to how she destroyed the two demons Sunda and Upasunda. It is said that a rakshasa

by name mahishmathi did severe penance. Brahma appeared. He requested that he should be blessed with two valarous sons who are unconquerable Brahma granted the wish. They were named as Sunda and Upasunda. They became invincible and these rakshasas collected an army and conquered even Swarga loka. The Gandarvas, the siddhars, the kinnaras and devas had to flee in fear. The devas then approached Brahma and requested Him to find a way out of the tricky situation created by him. Brahma then is said to have called Thilottama and instructed her to destroy the two brothers. Thilottama dressed herself to kill, sang the veena before the asuras. Both of them wanted to have her as their wife. They quarrelled amongst themselves and killed each other. That was how Thilottama was able to save the devas. It is said that as a reward for the job done by her, Brahma promised her sameepyam with Lord Vishnu. He had asked her to go to Thothadri and do penance there. Thilottama therefore told Urvasi that she was on her way to Thothadri to get the grace of Lord Vishnu. Urvasi also wanted to get similar sameepyam with Lord Vishnu. She decided to go along with Thilottama to Thothadri and do penance. They went to the banks of Chetru Thamarai, did severe penance. They repeated the Asktakshara mantram. After many years, Narayana along with Sridevi and Boodevi, seated on the divine vimana, came to Thothadri and gave darshan to Urvasi and Thilottama. The two divine damsels sought shelter at His lotus feet and wanted to be blessed with the fortune of serving Lord Narayana always. The Lord granted their request and asked them to wield the white chamaram to Him at Thothadri. Hence, it is believed that even to-day Urvasi and Thilottama are standing on either side of Thothadrinathan and fanning the Perumal with the Venchamaram i.e. white fan.

The next story relates how Mahavishnu gave darshan to Romasa Maharishi. It is believed that Romasa Maharishi did penance at Thothadri. He is said to have done the severest of penances viz., abstaining from eating, breathing and drinking and standing without touching the earth. Millions of years passed off like that. Pleased with that penance, Lord Vishnu appeared before him on the banks of the holy Chetru Thamarai. Lord blessed Romasa and said that henceforth the town will be

known as Romasa nagar. -He promised to stay in the same holy place and bless other devotees as well.

Yet another story which speaks about the greatness of having a bath in Chetru Thamarai relates as to how Dharmavatsala got cured of leprosy due to a bath that he had in Chetru Thamarai. Once upon a time, a merchant by name Vibheethaka lived on the north bank of Kaveri at Thirumoolam. A son was born to him. He named him Dharmavatsala. In course of time, Dharmavatsala became very rich by his hard honest work. But the riches took their toll. He became proud. He took to cheating. Soon he lost his wealth. He began to steal. Once some merchants came with a lot of money to do business. He bought some bulls quietly loaded on them sacks filled with stones and pieces of tiles, put some brown jaggery on the top. He went to the place where the merchants stayed. The merchants had gone out leaving their money behind. Dharmavatsala replaced their sacks with his sacks of stones and he sold the stolen property in the neighbouring town. Meantime, the merchants returned and found, they had been cheated. They went in search of the man who stole the property. They caught him and put him in prison. Hearing this, the mother of Dharmavatsala cried and begged the merchants to set her son free. In response to mother's tears, the merchants gave a good thrashing to the son and asked him to go away from that place. Dharmavatsala however went into the forest and used to kill many birds and animals and eked out his living. One day he was killed by a lion. He was later reborn. But due to his previous karma, he was afflicted with leprosy. He met Bhargava rishi and asked him as to how he could be cured of his illness. The rishi advised him to go to Thothadri and have his bath in Chetru Thamarai and thereby wipe out his sins. He asked him, after his bath, to worship Lord Hari who dwells there along with Sridevi and Bhoodevi as well as Markandeya and Brighu rishis. Accordingly, Dharmavatsala went to Thothadri, had his bath in Chetru Thamarai and worshipped Perumal. God appeared before him. Pleased with his penance God cured him of his illness. In due course he attained moksha.

Yet another story also reveals the greatness of Chetru Thamarai and Thothadrinatha Kshetram . It is said that once upon a time, there was a brahmin by name Vaidyanathan, well versed in vedas and philosophy. He was a saivite. He was living on the banks of the Vagavathi river and doing Siva pooja regularly. In due course, a son was born to him. Lord Siva appeared in his dream and asked him to name the child as Narayana. But as he was a great Siva Baktha, he disregarded the dream of his and named the child as Mahadeva. In due course, the boy grew up. His marriage was fixed. But just before the marriage, it was noticed that Mahadeva developed leprosy. The son went to all the sages. One of them asked them to go to Seerivaramangai and bathe in Chetru Thamarai and worship Lord Deivanayaka. Accordingly they went to Thothadri otherwise known as Vana-mamalai, stayed there for forty days eating the food given in the temple. The Lord rewarded him for the sincerity and cured his disease. As he worshipped Devenatha and got cured, he changed his name to Devanatha. His father then, on his return, remembered his earlier dreams and realised that this entire episode was a maya and a game played by Siva to ensure that he named his son after Narayana.

Long ago, there lived a man by name Shankanidhi. He had a daughter by name Suseela. She was well versed in the art of playing the Veena and singing. One day she saw a handsome boy by name Priyamvatha. He was a learned scholar well versed in the vedas. She wanted to marry Priyamvatha. But Priyamvatha was unwilling. He then cursed that Suseela and her friends become ghosts. In turn, the girls cursed that Priyamvatha also becomes a ghost. These ghosts wandered about. In due course, they met a sage by name Vedhanidhi who had come to have his bath in Kaveri river. Vedanidhi with his divine sight was able to understand the reason for this entire mistake. He asked them to go to Thothadri in Pandya Nadu and have their bath in the holy theertham and worship Devanatha and receive His blessings. He asked them to sprinkle the abisheka theertham, take a few drops of the oil with which the Lord was annointed and to drink it and eat the food offered in the temple. He assured them that they would be absolved of all their sins. They acted accordingly and the ghosts regained the human form and lived happily ever after in Thothadri nagar.

Having related the many stories connected with this holy divya desam, let us now note a few significant and unique features connected with this divya desam. In this holy place, Nammalwar does not have a separate sannidhi for himself. He is seated at the feet of the Lord in the Shatari itself. He is thus always at the Lords feet without any separation.

This divya desam is the seat of Vanamamalai mutt. The Vanamamalai Jeers reside here. The sannidhi belongs to the mutt.

There is another interesting fact connected with this divya desam. Vanamamalai Jeer is one amongst the eight heads appointed by Manavala Mamuni to spread vaishnavism. The golden ring worn by Manavala Mamuni is taken out in the month of Ippasi when the Moolam star is in the ascendant. The Vanamamalai jeer adorns that ring in his finger on that day and then offers Sripadha theertham to the devotees. Thus even today we can have a look at the ring worn by that great Vaishnavite preacher.

Everyday abishekam i.e. a bath with oil, is offered to the Perumal. The oil that is collected after giving the bath to the Perumal is poured into a deep well which is about 25 feet deep and 15 feet broad. This oil never gets rancid. On the other hand, it is believed that its association with the idol has conferred on the oil certain medicinal qualities. Whoever drinks one or two spoons of that oil, with deep faith and devotion, gets cured of all his illness, if any.

Epigraphical Highlights:

On the southern wall of the Central shrine in the Vanamamalai temple, there is an inscription which records the remission of taxes by the king on the lands at Seeravaramanga Chethurvediramangalam given to the temple. This land was gifted for providing special offerings and worship on the day of Mula in which the King was born. ¹

¹ Inscription Number 250 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

Yet another inscription on the same southern wall relating to the period of the Pandyan King Matavarman, records an endowment for the sacred bath of God Vanamamalai on the day of Pooram in Adi and another gift of one and half achchu to the temple servants by a resident for the daily supply of Nali of food to the servant who looks after the flower garden attached to the temple. ²

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the central shrine in this temple relating to the period of the Pandyan King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulasekharadeva refers to remission of taxes on some lands which had been given as deva danam to the temple to provide for daily offerings and worship to the temple and for the celebration of a special festival on the day of Mula the natal star of the King. ³

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the same shrine relating to the period of the Pandyan King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Konerinmaikondan records an order of the King granting certain land for meeting the expenses of offerings and worship during the service instituted in the name of the king. ⁴

Yet another inscription on the eastern wall of the prakara of the same temple relating to the period of the same Pandyan King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Konerinmaikondan purports to be an order of the deity while seated under the canopy in the temple. This order was issued to a certain jeer granting him and his disciples a daily allowance of 3 kurunai of offered food, out of the endowments secured by him to the temple. ⁵

Yet another inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan King Jatavaraman registers a gift of land for conducting a festival in the month of Chithirai on the day of Uthiram, the natal star of the King Virakodai Peralan. ⁶

² Inscription Number 252 & 253 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

³ Inscription No.254 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

⁴ Inscription No.256 & @75 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

⁵ Inscription No.258 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

⁶ Inscription No.259 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

Yet another inscription on the wall opposite the left dwara-palaka image in the second prakara of the temple relating to the period of Ramavarman states that when the God was seated on the Ramavarman Peetam certain perquisites were granted to Ramanuja Jiyan for the writing of the account. It is said that this was made by the Travancore King Ramavarman when he was camping at Shenbagaramanallur. ⁷

Another interesting inscription on the northern wall of the outer most prakara in this temple records a grant by the temple authorities of the right of fishing in the Eri to certain residents, in return for cleaning the silt in the tank every year. ⁸

Hymnology:

Nammalwar has sung 11 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of those pasurams along with the songs sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below.

Nammalwar's Pasuram No.

ஒனமாய் நிலம் நீண்ட என்னப்பனே! கண்ணா!!
 என்றும் என்னை யாளுடை
 வான நாயகனே! மணி மாணிக்கச் சுடரே!
 தேனமாம் பொழில் தண்சேரிவர மங்கல நகர்
 கை தொழாவுறை
 வானமாமலையே! அடியேன் தொழ வந்தருளே!!

Meaning:

Oh Lord! As a varaham you rescued mother earth from the depth of ocean;
 Oh Kanna! You are my master;
 On you who have the dazzling lusture of a precious ruby
 Oh Vanamamalai Perumal!

⁷ Inscription No.261 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.

⁸ Inscription No.262 ARIE 1927-28 Appendix B.



A View of the Nanguneri Temple Tower



Vaanamamalai Perumal Nanguneri



Nanguneri Utsavar



Thiruppullani Dharbasayana Perumal



Thiruppullani Temple Tower

Please come and out of your unequalled, unparalleled compassion and grace, bless me who is worshipping you.

**Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Aandaadi:**

வானோர் முதலா மரம் அளவா எப்பிறப்பும்
ஆனேங்கு அவதியிடம் ஆகாதோ? - தேன் ஏயும்
பூ வர மங்கை, புவி மங்கை, நாயகனே!
சீவரமங்கை அரைசே!

Meaning:

O' Divine consort of Bhoodevi and Sreedevi; seated on a lotus flower full of honey;

O' king of Srivaramangai;

Will you not release me from this cycle of births, deaths and rebirths and confer on me the benediction of salvation?

* * *

THIRUTHANGAL

This Divya Desam is one of the 18 Pandya Nadu divya desams. This divya desam is in West Ramnad District. It is on the bus route between Virudhunagar and Sivakasi. The story relating to this divya desam is mentioned in Brahmandapuram in eight adhyayams. The Moolavar is known as Thiruthangal Appan. This is the name given to him by the Alvar. The Moolavar is seen along with Sri Devi, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. He is also known as Nindra Narayanan i.e. Narayanan who is seen in a standing pose or Sthitha Narayanan. The Thayar is known as Sengamala Nachiar as also Anna Nayagi. A peculiar feature of this place is that the Thayar is seen in a standing posture. Mostly whenever there is a thani Nachiar i.e. a separate shrine for the Goddess, the Goddess is invariably seen in a sitting posture. But here the Goddess is seen in a standing posture facing east. One hand is hanging by the side and one hand has an abhaya mudra. The Goddess is considered to be very powerful. Many devotees have their wishes fulfilled by praying sincerely to this Goddess. The vimanam is known as Soma Sandha Vimanam. The temple as well as the God is located on a small hillock. The hill is known as Thanga Malai. There are four tanks in this place viz. Papanasini which is in front of the temple. To the east of the town there is a Baskara theertham, Sanga theertham and Padma theertham. About two miles north on the Virudhunagar bus route, one comes across Arjuna Nadhi i.e. Arjuna river. This is also regarded as one of the theerthams of this place. God appeared before Sri Devi, Pururavas, Bana the asura, Lord Siva, Muruga, Markandeya, Brighu Maharishi and a tiger. The place is known as Thiruthangal, Thiruthangalur and Sripuram. There is even an old Tamil proverb associated with the name of this Divya Desam. In Tamil it reads as follows:

“திருத் தங்கல் கண்டால் (உலகில்)
மருத்தங்கல் கிடையாது”

That is to say if one visits Thiruthangal, there will be no rebirth in this world.

Another unique feature of this temple is the figure of Garuda. Opposite to the Perumal Sannidhi the figure of Periya Thiruvadi can be seen. The figure of Garuda is in an unusual pose here. He is seen holding the Amudha Kalasam in his right hand. The left hand is seen holding a snake. Two other hands are seen in an anjali pose i.e. hands are folded. Thus, Garuda has got four hands in this place.

In the Garbagriha along with the Moolavar, there are idols for 11 others along with the idol of Narayana seen in standing pose. On the right side is seated Markandeyar and Garuda with his hands folded in standing posture. Visvakarma, Sri Devi, Bhoo Devi and Aruna are also seen on the right side. Perumal is seen with his right hand directed towards his feet and the left hand kept on the waist. To the left of the Moolavar, Jambavathi, Usha, Aniruddhan, Brighu Maharishi are seen. In front of the Moolavar the pancha berars are seen.

There are a number of stone inscriptions at the bottom of the vimanam, on the top of Garbagriham as also on the sides of the vimanam.

Let us now turn to Sthalapuranam of this place. Once upon a time in Naimisaraniam, Suthapuranikar was present. The rishis asked him to relate the story of Sri Kshetram which is another name for Thiruthangal. Suthapuranikar said that the story relating to Sri kshetra mahatmiyam is very powerful and will confer blessings on all those who listen to it and that whoever listens or reads this story will be blessed with the presence of Thayar in his house.

Budha, one of the Navagrahas, had a grand son. His name was Pururava Chakravarthi. He was a great warrior as also a person who upheld dharma. He was a great administrator. He was very kind. When he became old, he entrusted the kingdom to his sons and along with his wife went to the forest. He met the rishis. They welcomed him. The rishis asked the king as to why he had come to the forest. The king replied that however wealthy and famous a man may be, if he does not have peace of mind, there is no purpose and pleasure in life. The king said that

all the pleasures in the world are not permanent. They do not give true happiness and that an intelligent person would always want to attain moksha. The king said he had reached that stage of enlightenment and so had sought the rishis so as to learn from them the means to attain salvation. The rishis replied "you please visit the Divya Desams where Lord is having nithya vasam. You should also stay in those places and offer service to the sages and in due course you will attain your objective. Amongst all the Divya Desams, you should, without fail, visit Sri kshetram (Thiruthangal)". They said that they had heard from Narada the greatness of that Divya Desam and that they would repeat to him whatever they heard from Narada.

In that place Para Vasudeva along with Thayar is residing. In that place there are five theerthams and a small hillock. It is full of wise men. All the sins can be washed away by having a bath in Papanasa theertham which is an important theertham in that place. The other theerthams like Baskara theertham, Padma theertham, Sanga theertham, are also equally important. In the north, Arjuna river flows. It is considered to be an amsam of Ganga nadhi itself. The small hillock is known as Thangal parvath. Along with Thirumagal Thayar, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi are also there. Having related all this the sages continued to relate as to how this place got the name Sri kshetram.

Once upon a time when Perumal was lying down in Tiruparkadal in yoga nidhra, there was a discussion between Sri Devi, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi. They wondered as to who amongst them was greatest. The discussion became heated. The ladies in waiting of Sri Devi said that Lakshmi alone is the greatest. She only is the embodiment of prosperity in this world. She is the eternal mother. She is Mangala Devathai. She is the most favourite of Perumal. It is because of association with Lakshmi Devi that Perumal is known as Sripathi, Srinikethan as also Srinivasan. Brahma, Indra and other Devas were all waiting eagerly to have a glimpse of this Goddess of wealth. Only if her kataksham rests on a person, people get peace of mind. Vedas praise her only. So said those ladies. Immediately the ladies in waiting of Bhoo Devi said that it is Bhooma Devi who is the greatest amongst the three. Bhooma Devi is greater

than others as she is the very foundation for this earth (Jagath aatharam). It is she who is bearing with immense patience this entire world. Vishnu is very fond of her. It is the earth which provides us with food, cloth and shelter. As she is the mother earth, it is with her blessings that we are able to live in this world. When Perumal took the form of Vamanan, he requested from Mahabali in the yaga salai three feet of this earth only. During the pralaya times Perumal saved mother earth from destruction. Vedas also praise her. She is known as Darani Darithri and Sarvam Satra. The God manifested himself in his Varaha avathar in order to rescue this Thayar. Even Lakshmi is very fond of Bhoo Devi. As such, it is Bhoo Devi who is the most important so said those ladies. Now it was the turn of the ladies in waiting of Neela Devi to enumerate the points in her favour. They said that the other two Thayars are fully aware of the greatness of Neela Devi. The Vedas also praise her, as she is seen in the Rasa roopa. Vedas refer to the Perumal as "Raso vaisaha". She is seen as water. She is the Athishtana Devatha of water. She was the person who was entrusted by Perumal the Purana Purushar with the task of creating this world. Water is also known as Naram. As Perumal is lying down on the laps of Neela Devi i.e. cosmic ocean, He is known as Narayanan. The Neela suktham praises this Thayar so said the ladies. The argument continued. Sri Devi got annoyed and she left the place and went to Thiruthangal hill. In that hill, she started her tapas. When Thirumagal came to Thiruthangal hill, the rishis started worshipping her. Pleased with their bakthi the Goddess promised to give them whatever boon they asked. They then said "Oh Devi we are happy that we have your darshan. We feel we have achieved our life's objective; but even then we have one request. You should continue to reside here and with the name of Arunakamala Mahadevi stay here and bless and protect the devotees". The Thayar agreed. After the rishis left, the Thayar continued to repeat the ashtakshra mantram on the banks of Papanasa Pushkarini and was doing japam. Perumal was pleased with her severe penance. He got up from Tiruparkadal, got on to Garuda and appeared before Sri Devi. He promised to give a boon as a reward for her penance. He assured her that she was the most important amongst his Devis that is why she is always referred to as Periya Pirati. He said "It is because of you

I am known as "Sriyah Pathi". Even with your slightest glance directed towards a person he will be able to attain the status of Indra, Brahma etc. If you are not there, there will be poverty in that place. Pleased with this confirmation of her status Goddess Lakshmi requested to show the same kindness towards her children and sages living in that place. She requested that Perumal continue to stay in Thiruthangal hill along with her and that He should give darshan to his devotees in the same posture he is seen in Tiruparkadal - i.e. lying down on Adishesha - i.e. sesha sayana pose. Perumal agreed. He said "Oh Lakshmi as you have done sincere and severe penance, this place henceforth will be known as Sri kshetram. Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi also came there. They also bowed down before Lakshmi Devi accepting that she was the most favourite Thayar for Perumal and that she was the greatest amongst the three and that ashtaisvaryam is obtained by the living beings only with the help of Goddess Lakshmi. They also assured her that whoever visited that hill and prayed to her would definitely attain moksha.

Let us now turn to the stories connected with the theerthams. Pururavas Chakravarthi requested Narada to relate to him the stories connected with these pancha theerthams. Narada said that once upon a time Sindhumaha Muni was doing tapas in Saligramam. Thanks to the blessings of Brahma, Sindhumaha Muni had two girls viz. Sukrithi and Vukrithi. The children were very well behaved showing lot of respect to elders. In due course, they attained marriageable age and with the permission of their father Sukrithi married Sun God. Vukrithi got married to a great sage by name Susarma. Once Sukrithi was praying to her husband the Sun God. At that time, a demon by name Chandagoshan abducted her. Coming to know of this, Sun God let loose one of his weapons on Chandagoshan. Immediately, frightened by that, the demon took shelter behind a sage who was doing tapas. The weapon let loose by Sun God killed both the sage and the demon. Thus, unwittingly, Sun God committed Brahma Hathi Dosham. Narada advised Sun God to go to Thiruthangal and worship the Perumal there in order to redeem himself of the Brahma Hathi Dosham. He advised him to do his tapas on the banks of Pushkarini in front of Thiruthangal temple. Sun God had his bath in this Pushkarini

and immediately got rid of the Brahma Hathi Dosham. Since that day, the tank came to be known as Baskara Theertham.

Papanasa Theertham:

Long ago Ganga river and other 60 rivers joined together and decided to meet Sriman Narayanan and went to Tiruparkadal. Enroute, they met the Saptha Rishis. The Rishis asked them as to where they were going and why. The river Goddesses told him about their destination viz. Tiruparkadal. The sages then looked at them and said that God was now staying in Thiruthangal otherwise known as Sri Kshetram at Thangal hill and asked them to go there. They also added that that kshetram and the Perumal there were very powerful and that their desires would be fulfilled. The river Goddesses acted accordingly and worshipped Appan at Sri Kshetram. They told Perumal that people who committed Sisu Hathi (killing of child), Guru Hathi (killing of teacher), Mathru Hathi (killing of mother), Pithru Hathi (killing of father), Mithra Hathi (killing of friends) and Sthri Hathi (killing of women) and other types of heinous sins, all come and have their bath in their flowing waters and get purified, leaving behind the burden of the sins with the rivers. They requested God to advise them on getting rid of this unwanted burden. Perumal advised them to see that the dust from the feet of all devotees falls on their head and a bath in the holy pushkarini at Thiruthangal will purify them. Accordingly, the river Goddesses had their bath in the tank in front of the temple and got rid of all the accumulated sins. Hence this Pushkarini came to be known as Papanasini Theertham. It is believed that people who have a bath in this Pushkarini are sure to attain moksha after being absolved of all their sins.

Arjuna Nadhi:

To the north of the town the Arjuna river flows. Once upon a time it is believed that Pandavas while roaming about in the forest, reached Tirupullani. They offered worship to the Perumal there and reached Thiruthangal. At that time it was sun rise. Arjuna thought of Ganges and used his varuna asthram and let loose an arrow into the earth. Water came gushing out from the bottom of the earth. It was Ganga. Immediately all

the Pancha Pandavas had their bath in that spring and offered their early morning worship. Since that day this river came to be known as Arjuna Nadhi.

Thankal Malai:

The temple situated on this hillock is known as Thankal Malai. The hill itself has got a lot of power. In this hill itself there are shrines for Lord Siva who is known as Karu Nelli Nathar and Palani Andavar i.e. Lord Subramanya.

Once upon a time there was an island by name Swetha Theevu. In that island Adhi Sesha and a banyan tree had a friendly discussion. As the discussion proceeded, it became very heated, as they wanted to know who amongst the two was favoured by God to a greater degree. They decided to go to Lord Brahma to resolve this ticklish issue. Brahma then said both of them had rendered great service to Perumal; one acted as the divine couch for Perumal; the other had produced a leaf on which God rested during the great Pralaya. Yet Brahma said that between the two, it is Adhi Sesha who will be praised more because Perumal rested on the banyan leaf only once whereas He has been showering His grace on the devotees for ever remaining with Adi Sesha in different postures - viz. standing, sitting and resting. The banyan tree felt dejected, it started doing severe penance praying to Perumal. Perumal was pleased with its penance. He appeared with Thayar. The banyan tree then requested that it also should be equally favoured like Adhi Sesha and that God should sit, lie down and stand on it also. To satisfy that desire Perumal asked the tree to go to Sri Kshetram in South India and assume the form of a hill. He asked the banyan to continue the tapas He assured the Banyan that He along with Sri Devi, Boo Devi, Neela Devi will give darshan to that Hill and will satisfy its wish. Accordingly, the banyan tree went to Thiruthangal kshetram and started a penance. As promised, in that mountain, God is seen in a sitting form, standing form and also a sayana form. Since then the banyan tree which assumed the form of a hill came to be known as Thangal Malai as it bore the form of the God on itself. The word Thangal Malai if it is split will read as follows:

Thangu + Ala + Malai. It means that the banyan tree in the form of a hill became the resting place for God at Sri Kshetram. This hill is regarded as very holy and many believe that it is the amsam of the banyan leaf on which God rested during the Pralayam.

Yet another interesting story connected with this Divya Desam relates to the life history of Devendra Vallaba Pandian. He was ruling Madurai. One day he went to hunt the animals. He was so taken up with the beauty of the spot that he stayed the night there. The next day he continued with his hunting. At that time a fierce tiger appeared. This tiger was a Gandharva in the previous birth by name Chandra Kethu. He was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. The Pandian chased the tiger. Because of its punya accumulated from the previous birth this Gandharva converted into a tiger ran hither and thither and finally reached Thiruthangal hill. As soon as he reached there, suddenly the tiger became very bold. It turned round and was ready to fight the king. The King then let loose an arrow and it reached its target. The tiger fell down dead. Immediately, from the body of the tiger a Gandharva emerged having been released from his earlier sins. The King was surprised. The Gandharva told him his story. He said that he was a gandharva King by name Chandra Kethu. One day along with his Ministers he was listening to a beautiful sweet song. At that time Guru Bhagawan was going to Indra sabha; but he did not notice him. Guru Bhagawan then thought that the gandharva had shown disrespect to the Deva Guru. Immediately he cursed that he be born as a fierce tiger on earth. The Gandharva fell at his feet and pleaded for pardon. But Guru said that the curse once uttered cannot be recalled and that however he would assure him that on the earth a person by name Devendra Vallabhan would be born. He would go hunting in the Thankal Malai. At that time if an arrow is let loose by him, he will be released from the curse and will regain his true form. Since that day the Gandharva had been roaming in Thankal Malai. The place where this tiger got released from the curse even today is known as Puli Parai i.e. tiger stone. The Gandharva then attained moksham.

Yet another story connected with this Divya Desam relates

to the marriage of Anirudhan with Usha. Anirudhan is the grand son of Lord Krishna. This story was also related by Suthapuraniakar. Once upon a time in Dwapara yuga Mahabali's son Banasura was ruling the earth. He had thousand hands. He undertook a very severe penance, to Lord Siva. Pleased with the penance Lord Siva had blessed him and said that he will rule the entire world. Assured of this blessing he started terrorizing and victimising the people on earth. He had a daughter by name Usha. One day this daughter Usha had a strange dream where she saw in her mind's eye a beautiful youth equal in beauty to Manmatha. She woke up from her dream and was consumed by the desire to see in real life that beautiful youth. She narrated this dream to her friend Chitraleka. She promised to resolve the issue by drawing pictures of beautiful youths and asking Usha to identify the man who appeared in her dream. Finally when she drew the picture of Anirudhan the grand son of Lord Krishna, Usha identified the person as the one who appeared in her dream. Chitraleka assured Usha that she would bring Anirudhan. She went to Dwaraka, entered the palace and in the seventh floor, Anirudhan was sleeping. She lifted the very cot on which he was sleeping and brought him over to the palace where Usha was staying. Usha was very happy. So was Anirudhan. The young lovers unknown to her father spent their time happily in the palace. One day when Bana came to know about this, he was very angry. He was about to murder the young lovers. At that time he heard an asareeri voice asking him not to kill them. It is said, if he were to kill them, he would in turn be destroyed. Bana therefore tied up Anirudhan with a Naga asthram and kept him in the prison. Narada heard about this. He went to Dwaraka, met Lord Krishna and informed him of what had happened to His grand son. Krishna was very angry. Along with Balarama (Sangarshanan), Samban, Sathyaki and other warriors, he headed the army and went to Magishmathi town where Bana lived. Fierce battle between Bana's army and the army of Lord Krishna took place. Finally, Krishna himself took charge even as Lord Siva took charge of the army of Banasura. Lord Subramania and Nandhi also joined on the opposite side. Finally, Banasura himself emerged. Lord Krishna let loose the Chakrayudha. It cut off 998 arms of Banasura. He would have torn asunder the balance of two as well. At that time, Lord

Siva pleaded for the life of his Siva Baktha viz. Banasura. Lord Krishna spared the life of Banasura with Banasura promising to celebrate the wedding of Usha and Anirudhan. Krishna, Usha, Anirudhan and all the devas started towards Dwaraka. Enroute they reached Thangal Malai and Sri Kshetram. There Pururasu Chakravarthi was doing severe tapas. He was standing on one leg at the foot of the hill, with his two eyes concentrating on the tip of the nose. Besides, all the time he would not even blink. He was thus centring all his thoughts on the divine feet of Perumal. He was standing immovable almost like a log of wood. Lord Krishna saw this. He appeared before Pururasu Chakravarthi. The king was very happy when he saw Perumal along with Sri Devi, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi. He then requested that Lord Krishna celebrate the wedding at Thangal Malai itself instead of at Dwaraka and he requested that Perumal stays at Thangal Malai itself. Accordingly, the wedding of Anirudhan and Usha was celebrated at Thiruthangal and Perumal continued to stay in the same place.

This Divya Desam finds mention in the story related in Silapathikaram. It is therefore evident that this place was in existence even during the times when Silapathikaram was written.

Hymnology:

Bhootath Alwar and Thirumangai Alwar have sung 5 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. A few of such pasurams along with the song sung Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Bhootath Alwar:

Irandaam Thiruvandaadhi - 70th pasuram:-

தமருள்ளம் தஞ்சை தலையரங்கம் தண்கால்
தமருள்ளும் தண் பொருப்பு வேலை - தமருள்ளும்
மாமல்லை கோவல் மதிள் குடந்தை என்பரே
ஏவல்ல எந்தைக் கிடம்.

Meaning:**The Perumal**

Who defeats and destroys the enemies - Out of kindness and of His own free will and volition has taken residence in the minds of His devotees - In Tanjai Mamani Kovil - In Srirangam - In Thiruthankal - In Thirumalai, a place which is ever in the minds of devotees -

In Thirupparkadal -

In Thirukkadalimalli (Mahabalipuram) -

In Thirukkavalor -

In Thirukkudanthai - and other divya desams.

Thirumangai Alwar:- Peria Thirumozhi (5-6-2):

பேரானைக் குறுங்குடி எம்பெருமானை திருத் தண்கால்
ஊரானைக் கரம்பனூர் உத்தமனை - முத்திலங்கு
காரார் திண் கடலேழும் மலையேழ் இவ்வுலகேழ்ண்டும்
ஆராதென்றிருந் தானைக் கண்டது தென்னரங்கத்தே.

Meaning:

The Perumal who is residing at Thiruppernagar, Thirukkurungudi, Thiruthankal, Thiru Uthamarkovil in Karambanur is the one who swallowed the seven oceans, seven mountains and the entire world and kept them safe in His stomach and appeared as if His hunger and penchant for protection was not as yet appeased - I saw Him at Srirangam.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupathi Andaadi

மாறுபட வாடை யெனும் வன்கால் வந்து என்முலை-
மேல்

ஊறுபட லூர்ந்த உனைவெல்லாம்மா (ஆ)றத்
திருத்தண் காலுரான் திருத் தண்டுழாயின்
மருத்தண் கால் ஊராதோ வாய்ந்து.

Meaning:

Oh won't the cool gentle breeze wafting the sweet fragrance of the Basil (Tulasi) garland worn by the Perumal of

Thiruthankal remove all the sorrow in my heart caused by
seperation from my Lord.?

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THIRUPPULLANI

This is one of the famous Divya desams in Pandya Nadu. It is approachable from Ramanathapuram. One has to alight at Manamadurai Railway Station or get down at Ramanathapuram and take a bus to reach this place. While referring to Thiruppullani divya desam one has to simultaneously refer to sethukarai. In the earlier days people used to refer to the boundries of the country by saying from Himalayas in the North to Sethukarai in the south. Thus, this divya desam is almost the southern boundry of our sub continent. The moolavar here is known as Adi Jagannathan. He is seen in a standing posture. There are two thayars here. One is known as Kalyanavalli and the other is known Padmasini. The theertham is Hema theertham, Chakra theertham, Agasthiya theertham, Hamsa theertham, Varuna theertham, Dharuna theertham, Rama theertham, Ksheera nadhi, Kanva nadhi, Hiranya nadhi, Ratnakara samudram (Adi Sethu). The sthala viruksham is Asvatta viruksham. The Vimanam is Kalyana vimanam. In this place God appeared to Pullaranya Muni, Samudra Rajan, Devalar Muni and Kanva Maharishi. There are two other sannidhis very close to this divya desam which are equally famous. One is the sannidhi of Dharbasayana Raman. The other is the sannidhi of patabisheka Ramar. In this chapter, the stories connected with all these three sannidhis will be related.

This place is known as pullaranyam as also Thiruppullani, Pullanai, Thiruvanai, Adisethu, Dharbasayanam, Ratnakara Kshetram, Nalasethu, Saranagathi Kshetram and as Pullan Kadu. There is an old proverb associated with this place. The proverb in Tamil runs as follows:

"Thiru Anai Kana Aruvinai illai"

Translated this means that if one sees the bridge built by Srirama in this place, all the problems will get resolved. The sthala puranam of this place is related in Agneya puranam in the nine chapters where Bhuvanakosam is being described. Besides all the books which deal with the story of Ramayana also mention the greatness of this place, as Rama before going to Lanka visited

this place and it was He who was responsible for building a bridge across the ocean so as to cross over to Lanka and to rescue the divine mother from Lanka. Thus, the sthala puranam of this place is told even in Valmiki Ramayanam, Kamba Ramayanam, Tulasi Ramayanam, Adyatma Ramayanam, Raghu Vamsam etc.

The Moolavar here is known as Adi Jagannathan. He is also known as Deivasilaiyar, Divyasapar. Deivasilai Perumal Nayanar (this is the name that one come across in the epigraphical evidences). He is also known as Tiruppullani Alwar and as Dakshina Jagannathan. The Utsavar is known as Kalyana Jagannathan. Let us now try to briefly relate the stories connected with this divya desam.

Once upon a time all the rishis assembled in a place. They decided to perform the chatravelvi which is a yaga performed for twelve years. They wanted to choose a place which will be fit for performing such a great yaga. They met Lord Brahma and asked him to help them in choosing the site. Brahma is said to have taken a dharba grass rolled it into a shape of a wheel and just allowed it to role along on earth. That wheel is said to have rolled along and settled in a particular place in India. That place was known as Naimisaranyam. Nemi in Sanskrit means a wheel i.e. a Chakra Valaiyam. The rishis started performing the chatram yagam. They used to spend the evening time by asking sootha puranikar to relate to them the stories connected with the various divya desams. On one such occasion, Sootha Puranikar related to the rishis the stories of Pullaranya Kshetram.

It is learnt that there was a famous rishi by name Pullar. He was staying in Pullaranya Forest and offering worship to the Lord. After a long period of penance, God along with his three devis appeared before him. He is said to have given his darshan to Pullar rishi by appearing under a arasa maram (Banyan tree). This arasa maram is a very great tree in this place. Later on in this chapter a detailed account of the glory of this tree will be given. When god appeared before pullar rishi, he was very happy. He requested God to stay on in the same place so as to enable other devotees also to have this darshan. God

conceded his request and agreed to stay underneath the arasa maram. Pullar rishi continued to stay in the same place having his bath in Chakra theertham, worshipping Adi Jagannathan and in due course attained salvation.

Another story connected with this place relates to another rishi by name Devalar. He was staying in an asram in that place and offering worship to the lord. Closeby there was a tank surrounded by flower groves and beautiful scenic splendoured beauty. One day seven deva kanyas taken in by the beauty of this natural lake, were playing in the groves and later decided to have their bath in the tank. The rishi chose that time to come there. The maidens were continuing to enjoy themselves and did not pay any respect to this rishi. He got angry and cursed the maidens. Realising their mistake these damsels fell at his feet and asked to be forgiven. The rishi told them that he could not withdraw his curse. However, he advised them to go to Pullaranyam (Thiruppullani) and fall at the feet of Pullar rishi. He may be able to help them. The maidens accordingly went to the Brahma rishi Pullar and related their story. Pullar advised them to stay on in the same place, worship Adi Jagannatha. He said in due course Sri Rama would come to Thiruppullani and the moment the glance of Sri Rama fell on them, they would be redeemed of their curse. The maidens accordingly used to worship Adi Jagannatha and spent their time near the temple. In due course, Rama came to Thiruppullani on his way to Lanka and these damsels were redeemed of their curse.

To the north of Tiruppullani about two or three miles away, there is a small river. On the banks of this river, there was an asram where Kanva Maharishi was residing. He was doing a severe penance in order to attain Moksha. One day he heard an asareeri voice telling him that shortly the son of Dasaratha viz. Sri Rama will be coming to Pullaranyam and at that time, if he were to stay on the banks of Chakra theertham and offer worship to Adi Jagannatha at Thiruppullani, his wish will be fulfilled. Immediately Kanva Maharishi also left his asram and shifted his residence to Thiruppullani waiting for the arrival of Sri Rama.

The story of Ramayana is so well known that it bears no repetition. Ravana who abducted Sita had kept her as a prisoner at Lanka. Sri Rama had taken the assistance of Sugreeva and other Vanara Sena to search for sita. He had come to know through Hanuman that Sita was kept captive in Lanka. He reached Thiruppullani. The Southern most tip of our country and was waiting to cross the ocean and march with his army to Sri Lanka. Meantime in Lanka Ravana was being advised by Mandothari as well as by Vibhishana that he had committed a heinous act and that it was not too late for him to atone for that sin by falling at the feet of Sri Rama and returning Sita to her husband. But Ravana turned a deaf ear to all these pleas. Disgusted with the situation, Vibhishana the brother of Ravana crossed the ocean. He came to Thiruppallani and sought sarangathi and abhayam from Sri Rama. It is said that this abhayam was sought by Vibhishana near Sethu karai. This is one of the reasons why this place is known as Saranagathi Kshetram. When Vibhishana sought protection at the feet of Rama, many were doubting his sincerity. But Rama made His famous statement that whoever seeks protection at His feet would be assured of protection and that He would not let them down. He gave this abhaya Pradhanam at this spot. Hence it is that some people refer to this as Sri Rama's Charama slokam. Vibhishana therefore continued to stay in Thiruppullani. He used to have his bath in Chakra theertham and worship Adi Jagannatha situated under the famous arasa maram. Sri Rama also worshipped this Adi Jagannatha and sought his help for succeeding in his venture to rescue sita. On one such occasion when Sri Rama prayed to Adi Jagannatha, the Perumal felt so moved and is said to have handed over the bow which he was carrying in his hand to Rama and assured Rama that equipped with that bow, he will be able to defeat Ravana and rescue Sita. As Adi Jagannatha Perumal gave the bow to Sri Rama in this place, the Perumal is known as Divyasapan as also Deivasilaiyar.

Naturally when Rama came to Thiruppullani, all the rishis like Kanva and other surrounded Rama and were continuing their poojas in that place. In course of time, Kanva rishi also attained salvation in this place and the seven damsels, as stated earlier got relieved of their curse by the glance of Sri Rama.

The main problem that Sri Rama had was as to how he could cross the huge ocean along with his monkey forces. One day Vibhishana suggested that Rama may summon Samudra Raja. Rama agreed. He is said to have spread a bed of dharba grass on the ground and lay down there for three days and worshipped Samudra Raja. But finding that Samudra Raja did not come, Rama got so angry and threatened that he would completely dry up the ocean. The Samudra Raja got frightened and realised his mistake and along with his wife Varuni came and stood before Rama and sought refuge at His feet. Raghava forgave him. Thus, besides Vibhishana, Samudraraja and his wife also sought Saranagathi at this place, justifying the name Saranagathi Kshetram to this divya desam. Varuna then asked Nalan and other monkey warriors to help him to build the bridge near sethu. This was the bridge which came to be known as Sethu Anai as also Thiru Anai. Nalan, the monkey warrior was the son of Visvakarma. All the monkeys helped in collecting huge boulders, putting them across the ocean and thus building the bridge. The story as to how the mighty as well as the meak helped Sri Rama in building this bridge is well known. It is said that even the little squirrels helped by wetting their bodies in the ocean, rolling on the shores and then going back to the bridge site and depositing there the sands that had stuck on to their wet bodies. Seeing this sincere though small effort by the Squirrel, Rama affectionately passed his three fingers over the back of this squirrel. The three white lines seen on the back of the squirrels are believed to be the imprint of Rama's fingers on the backs of the two squirrels which helped him while building the Sethu bridge.

Once in this place there was a rishi by name Kalvar. He was doing such a severe penance that he denied himself any food. He had only the air that he breathed as his food. He is said to have done this sort of penance for thousand years. God was pleased with this penance and appeared before him. The rishi was naturally very happy. He requested Perumal to bless him and continue to help him. Perumal assured him all support. One day, a rakshasa caught hold of the rishi. The rishi sought the help of Perumal. Perumal let loose his chakrayudham. Seeing the effulgent chakrayudham rushing towards him shining like

a thousand sun Gods, the rakshasa started running away. The discus chased him and cut off his head. Kalva Muni bowed down before the chakrayudham and requested that Chakrayudham to continue to stay on the tank bund so as to protect others as well. With the permission of Perumal, Chakrayudham continued to stay on the tank bed.

Before we turn to the stories connected with the holy theerthams and the holy tree of this place, let us spend a short time on getting to know about the dharba sayana Raman sannidhi and the Pattabisheka Raman Sannidhi. As stated earlier Sri Rama while seeking the help of Samudra Raja is believed to have laid down on a bed of Dharba grass. Hence he came to be known as Dharba Sayana Raman. Sri Desikan goes into the estacies over the expression in the eyes of this Dharba sayana perumal. He says:

"Prathi Sayana Bhoomika Bhooshithapayodhi bhulana" Freely translated it means that the god who is the ocean of mercy is seen lying down facing the dark ocean. It is as if Rama while lying down was chalking out a plan to cross the ocean and rescue Sri Sita. The vighraha here is very unique. It is as if the Perumal is lying down in a vira sayana pose in the midst of the warrior monkies. This is how Nigamantha Desikan describes the perumal here. When he said Veera Sayana Sayeetha Vaanara Bruth Ullaekai". the perumal is seen with a sword (Patta Katti) by his side. From his naval three stalks emerge supporting a huge lotus flower. The lotus is very beautiful. Besides the lotus itself presents a picture of a string of sculptures. On the top of the flower on the middle stalk is seated Brahma with his four faces. On the other two stalks are seen the Moon god and the sun god. The figures of Madhu Kaitapa, Sunkopasundar are seen in the top wall. At the feet of the God are seen the famous characters from Ramayana Sukan, Saranan, besides Brighu Maharishi is also seen seated. Markandeya rishi is seen seated near the head. A little far away from the feet as if admiring the divine feet of Sri Rama is seen the figure of Veera Hanuman. The Utasava Murthi is Kothanda Raman. He is seen along with Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman. In the southern portion of the ardha mandapa we can see the figure of

Vibhishana and to the north of the mandapa is located Varunan known as Ratnakaran. Varuni is also seated by his side. It is believed that while he was searching for Sita, Rama spent three nights and days in this place and slept on this Dharba bed.

The sannadhi of Pattabi Raman in this place is also equally famous. This sannidhi is in front of the dharba sayana Raman Sannadhi. Pattabisheka Raman is seen in a very majestic pose, in this sannidhi. After having defeated Ravana, victorious Rama along with Sita enroute to Ayodya seated in the pushpaka vimanam came to this place. The devotees in this place and the rishis had requested Rama to give darshan as Pattabisheka Rama in this place rather than in the distant Ayodya. God obliged. It is believed that a darshan of this Pattabirama will bring a lot of blessings to the devotees. Whoever has a bath in the Sethukarai and then does annadhanam to a brahmin will receive a blessing which is equal to feeding one lakh persons in Gaya, two lakh persons in Kasi and seven lakh people in Prayag. This is what Sri Rama told Sita when he stayed here on his return journey to Ayodha.

Yet another sannidhi which is equally famous in this place is the sannidhi of Santhanagopalan. This sannidhi is situated to the north of the sannidhi of Dharbasayana Rama. The Mandapan itself is known as Santhana Krishna mandapam. Here Balakrishna gives darshan seated on Adisesha. Adisesha himself is supported by eight elephants, another eight serpents and a tortoise acting as a base. On this raised platform the idol of Balakrishna looks like an emerald fixed on a silver hill. People offer their worship to this idol of Balakrishna in order to have progeny. It is believed that king Dasaratha installed this idol. After praying to this Balakrishna, people usually do Naga pratishta., in order to be blessed with children. The belief is so strong that we can see thousands of sculpted pieces of the snake installed by the various devotees lying around this mandapam.

Already mention has been made about Sethu anai i.e. the bridge near Sethu Karai, i.e. the ocean front. The sethu karai lies about two and half miles away from Thiruppullani. It is known as Adi Sethu. It can be reached by bus from

Thiruppullani, it is also known as Ratnakaram. Sethu in sanskrit refers to Anai i.e. bridge in Tamil. Hence it is that this place is also known as Thiru anai. As stated earlier when speaking about the boundaries of this huge sub continent, people refer to the Himalayas in the north and Kanyakumari in the south. But in the olden days, the words used while describing the boundries of the sub continent was "Aasethu Himachalam" i.e. the Southern boundry was recognised as sethu karai. Even in the Upanishads Perumal is referred to as "Amruthasaiasha Sethuhu". In Vishnu Saharanamam also Perumal is referred to as "Oushatham Jagakatha Sethuhu". Hence the greatness of this Sethu dates back to the Puranic times. Just as Brindavan is famous because of association with Krishna, the sethu karai is famous because of association with Rama. A little to the east of this Sethu karai lies the famous bridge built by Rama and his army of monkey warriors. Even today one can see this long stone bridge. Due to the efflux of time, certain parts are broken and it is not a continuous long stretch. Nigamantha Desikan says that it is good to have even a darshan of this bridge. Even the mere sighting of this bridge would rid one of many serious sins like Brahamahatty dosham etc. This bridge was referred to by Kalidasa as Adishesha. Kambar, the famous Tamil poet refers to this bridge as Bhoomadevi. This bridge is also known as Nala sethu as Nalan the monkey warrior was the main architect of this bridge.

On the shore there is a small shrine for Hanumani. The idol is seen facing south with his hands folded and eyes closed as if he is doing Rama Dhyanam. People have great faith in this idol of Hanuman. Every Wednesday and Saturday crowds throng to this shrine and worship is offered to Hanuman.

Let us now turn to a brief account of the theerthams i.e. holy tanks in this place. Every divya desam is known either for its sthala visesham or Murthi visesham or theertha visesham. To have all the three in one divya desam is somewhat rare. Even the theertha visesham can be of three types. It can be a river water or an ocean or a tank. A divya desam can have any one of the holy theerthams. Thiruppullani has all the three holy waters viz. the river, the ocean and the tanks. As stated earlier,

the holy tanks here are known as Chakra theertham, Agastiya theertham, Rama theertham. Chakra theertham is also known as Brahma theertham, Hamsa theertham, Dharuma theertham, Varuna theertham. The holy rivers are Kanva nadhi, Ksheera nadhi, Hiranya nadhi. Even today the Hiranya nadhi is flowing on the road between Sethu Karai and Thiruppullani.

There is a belief that the changing colours of the waters of the Chakra theertham predict the future of the country. If the water is clear, it foretells a good future for the country. If the water is golden in colour, it is said to indicate a fall in agriculture production. If the water is dirty and has plenty of fungus growing in it, it is said to indicate evil time for the animals.

Chakra theertham got its name as discus is reported to have had its cleansing bath in this tank. Once in Lanka there were three demons known as Mali, Sumali, Malyavan. Mali and Sumali were very wicked demons. They used to give a lot of trouble to the rishis. At the request of the rishis, God released the Sudharsana Ayudham to destroy the demons. Having achieved its task, the chakrayudham was soiled with the blood and flesh of the demons. To cleanse itself, it had a dip in this tank and the tank hence forth got the name chakra theertham. It is claimed that the water of this tank has certain chemical properties and hence a dip in that tank is a definite remedy for certain diseases.

Agastiya Theertham

Once upon a time, Agastiya rishi is said to have had his bath in this Agastiya theertham. He is said to have offered the prayers to his ancestors on this tank bund. This theertham is to the south of Chakra theertham. Pinda dhanam and tharpanam i.e. Prayers offered to one's ancestors on this tank bund are said to be very efficacious.

Hiranya Theertham

To the west of the Chakra theertham lies the Hiranya theertham. This is a river. It is believed that Hiranyan did tapas on the banks of this river and established his authority over the

ashta dik palakas i.e. Lords of the eight direction and hence this river is known as Hiranya theertham. As stated earlier, this river is identifiable on the ground even today. It is more popularly known today as Ponnani Kazhi. Thirumangai Alwar has sung about this Hiranya nadhi in his Thirumozhi 9-4-2 (9th decod 4th thirumozhi and second pasuram). In that Pasuram he says

"Ponnam Kazhikkana Pullinangal"

Ponnam Kazhi is the Tamil version for the Sanskrit word Hiranya Nadhi. The huge ocean near Sethu anai is also another of the theerthams of this divya desam.

Sthala Viruksham

The sthala viruksham of this place is asvattam (arasa maram). This ancient tree lies to the west of Perumal sannidhi and behind the Nachiyar sannidhi. The Asvat tree is regarded as very holy. In Bhagavat Gita (10-26) Lord Krishna said "Asvattaha sarva virukshanam" i.e. to say I am Asvat viruksham among the trees. The tree in Thiruppullani is said to have leaves which are slightly different from the leaves found in the normal arasa Maram. The Naga pratishtai i.e. setting up of the sculpted pieces of snake is usually done under this asvatta tree. It is under this tree that Pullavar, Kanvar and Kalvar rishis had darshan of Lord Narayana in response to their deep penance. It is said that when Narayana appeared before the munies at this spot, the tree itself from top to bottom had a golden effulgence. Hence even to day this tree itself is referred to as the embodiment of Narayan himself and is referred to as Aswath Narayana.

There are certain stories connected with this sthala viruksham. Once upon a time, a Muni by name Ashtavakkiram (Apparently the muni had a defective body) was singing the praises of Lord Brahma. Seeing this deformed body, Saraswati laughed. The rishi got angry and cursed that Saraswati be born as a human being on earth. As a consequence, Saraswati was born as the daughter of Kasi Raja. She had a son by name

Saraswathan. The king had taught the vedas to the child. One day he did not utter the verses correctly and hence the father beat the child. Seeing this, the mother Saraswati got angry and decided that she would herself teach the son. At that time, there was a severe drought on earth. Many sages and saints were offering prayers in order to minimise the evil effects of the drought. They were also repeating the vedas. They heard Saraswathan repeating the vedas on the banks of the river Saraswati. The sages found that there was a difference in the way they repeated the vedas and in the way the boy was singing. The sages went to Lord Brahma and asked him to clear their doubt as to which was the right way of rendering the vedas. Brahma came along with them to Thiruppullani. They assembled under the arasa maram. They prayed to the Perumal there and Brahma sought the guidance of Perumal to resolve this tricky issue. Perumal then advised both the parties to recite the vedas under the arasa tree. He added that if the leaves of the tree remained stationery and immobile that particular recitation of the vedas was the correct method. Brahma therefore asked the brahmins and the sages assembled there as also Saraswathan to repeat the vedas under the tree. When Saraswathan recited the vedas, the leaves stood immobile. Since that time in this world the vedas are taught as per Saraswathan's pattern. Thus the arasa maram in Thiruppullani acted as a judge to decide the correct method of recitation of vedas.

It is under this tree that Sri Rama stood and worshipped Adi Jagannatha. It is under this tree that Rama was presented with the bow by Adi Jagannatha (Story related earlier). It is believed that on his victorious return from Srilanka Rama alighted from his pushpaka vimanam and stood under this tree and offered his thanks giving worship to Adi Jagannatha (Divya sapan).

Before concluding the Sthala purana of this place, two other interesting factors must be mentioned here. One is relating to the Jewels of this Lord. The Perumal has a single stone diamond ear rings for his ears (Kadukan). Each one of them is a 25 carrot diamond. The thayar has a diamond waist belt as well as necklace. The Dharbhasayana Raman adorns a long 75

sovereigns chain and a six stranded Yagnopaveetham, besides a diamond crown. The Perumal also has a diamond hastam.

This temple is under the control of the Ramanathapuram devasthanam. It is believed that originally when Sri Rama came in search of the divine mother, Sita to this place, this area was ruled by certain brave chieftains. It was known as Sethu Nadu. The warrior kings were known as Sethupathis. These chieftains helped Sri Rama a lot. This name of sethupathis is said to have been bestowed on the king by Rama himself. Later after his victorious return from Lanka, Rama entrusted the Sethu Anai as well as the area to this warrior's family. The Sethupathis of today are the descendants of the warrior chieftain who helped Sri Rama.

The Sculptural Masterpieces in this Temple

This ancient temple has got plenty of beautiful sculpted pieces. In the Parthi ula Mandapam, which is in front of the Perumal and Thayar sannidhis, there is a life size image of the sethupathis. It is very realistic and eye catching. Similarly, the idol of Dharbasayana Raman and the Nabi Kamalam are examples of sculptural mastery.

Enroute to Thiruppullani and Adisethu banks, there is a temple known as Chinna Koil i.e. small temple. It is about 3 furlongs to the north of sea front. This is the temple for Lord Srinivasa. This temple is under the control of Ramanathapuram devasthanam. Special mention should be made of one particular piece of image in this temple. It is white in colour. It is the idol of Sri Swetha Madhavan. The Idol facing south, is in a standing posture. Shanku and the Chakram held by the perumal are not in the usual pattern. The positioning is altered. The chakram has Lakshmi Narasimha and the Shanku has Lakshmi Narayana sculpted on it. The desavaatarams are sculpted around the body of the Perumal. As proof that the idol has got Raja Lakshanam one should see the feet of the Perumal. There the big toe is shorter than the other toes of the foot. This idol is believed to have been got out of the sea bed. There is a sculpture piece of Agastiar to the north of this Perumal Sannidhi. This Agastiyar

piece is kept under a tree. This sculpture is also white in colour. It is seen in a standing posture. This is also believed to have been fished out of the sea bed. This sculpture piece has a line near the knee cap. It is as if the sea waves were washing the feet upto that spot. Next to this Agastiyar idol is the idol of the Ganesa. The local people while referring to these two idols refer to both in a single word and hence the Agastiyar is known as Vellai Pilliyar i.e. white Ganesa.

Any story of this divya desam will be incomplete without mentioning how the Sethu Anai had figured in the song composed by Thyagaraja. The song is in Karahara Priya Ragam is given below with its meaning.

Pallavi: "Chaetulara Sringaramu Chaesi Choothunu Sri Rama"

Anu Pallavi: Sethu-thandana, Surapathi, Sarasiruha,
Bhavadu Pogada Na.

Charanam:

Merugu Bangaramdelu Petti
Maetiyow Sariga valvalu gatti
Suratharu Sumanula Siganinda chutti
Sundaramagu momuna muddhu betti
Molanu kundanapu gazzelu koorchi
Mudduga Nudutuna Tilakamu deerchi
Yalakalapai Ravi rekayu jaorchi
Andhamaina Ninnuramuna Jaerchi
Ani muthyala kondae vaesi
Havusuga parimala gandhamu poosi
Vani suratichae visaraga vasi
Vasi yanuchu Thyagarajanutha Anni Rosi

Meaning:

Oh Rama I shall decorate you with my own hands.
Oh Lord who built the Sethu bridge
I shall decorate you so beautifully as to elicit the admiration of
Brahma and other devotees and shall enjoy the sight myself

You will have golden anklets for your feet
 High class golden clothes for your dress
 Your tuft will be decorated with sweet smelling parijata
 flowers
 I will kiss your beautiful face
 I shall tie a string of golden beads round your waist Your
 forehead will be adorned with a Tilaka and a pendent.
 I shall hug you close to my chest Oh beautiful one.
 Your hair in the front will be adorned with pearls.
 Your body will be smeared with sweet smelling sandal paste.
 Saraswati will come and fan you
 At that time I will look at you and exclaim "Well done" and
 cast aside everything else.

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar has sung 21 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of those pasurams along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are give below:-

Peria Thirumozhi (9-4-5):-

வில்லால் இலங்கை மலங்கச் சரம் துரந்த
 வல்லாளன் பின்போன நெஞ்சம் வருமளவும்
 எல்லாரும் எள்தன்னை ஏசிலும் பேசிடினும்
 புல்லாணி எம் பெருமாள் பொய் கேட்டிருந்தேனே.

Meaning:-

(This pasuram is the sweet and bitter words uttered by the Nayaki on her seperation from the Perumal of Thiruppullani).

My mind played truant and ran after the great warrior Lord who destoryed Lanka by letting loose arrows from His bow. Till my truant mind returns, even if all people ridicule, berate and deride me, I pin my hopes on the false promises held out by the Lord of Thiruppullani. I will continue to pine for my warrior Lord.

**Divya KAvi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupati Andaadi:**

மதயானை கோள் விடுத்து மாமுதலை கொன்ற
கதையால் இதயந் கரையும் - முதலாய
புல்லாணி மாலே! புறத்தோர் புகழிருப்பு
வல்லாணி என் செவிக்குமாறு.

Meaning:-

Oh the first and foremost Perumal, residing at Tiruppul-
lani, My heart melts when I hear the story of your rushing to
the rescue of Gajendra the elephant which was helplessly caught
in the clutches of the crocodile and how you destroyed the evil
crocodile. When I hear and compare stories about the fame of
other devas, their achievement pales into insignificance.

Note:- The poet makes it clear that Perumal is the Supreme
Saviour and that the other Gods are as insignificant
like candle light in the presence of the bright sunlight!

* * *

AZHAGAR KOIL - THIRUMALIRUM SOLAI

Azhagar koil is one of the important divya desams of Pandya Nadu. It is situated about 12 miles northwest of Madurai. It is at the foot of a high range of hills called Azhagar malai. As the name itself suggests, the presiding deity in this temple as well as the hills is "Azhagar". Literally translated it means the beautiful one. In Sanskrit the Perumal is known as Sundararaja Perumal. He is also known as Kallazhagar, Maliruncholai Nambi.

This temple is situated in an area of about 300 acres. It is located in a very picturesque spot surrounded by the ruins of the fort. The impressive tower at the entrance was built by one of the Pandyan kings. The hill is full of natural beauty having thick groves, dense forests, numerous water falls, valleys filled with flowering shrub, thus providing a feast to the mind and the eye. Some regard the evergreen mountain as the embodiment of God Himself. In Paripadal, a Tamil literary work of Sangam age written several thousands of years ago, it is said that Azhagar hill is the body of God Himself. Many used to worship this mountain as Perumal Himself. This practice is in vogue even today. The beauty of the hills is brought out by Perialwar in the following verse:-

“ ஆயிரம் தோள் பரப்பி முடியாயிரம் மின்னலக
ஆயிரம் பைந்தலைய அனந்த சயனம் ஆளும் மலை
ஆயிரம் ஆனுகளும் சினைகள் பலவாயிரமும்
ஆயிரம் பூம்போழிலுமுடை மாலிருஞ் சோலையதே”.

This place finds mention in very many puranas as also Tamil literary works and in the pasurams of the Alwars. It has thus got a hoary history dating back to centuries. The hill is also known as Thiru Mal Irum Solai. Literally translated it means that it is the hill of God full of groves. It is also known as Vanagiri i.e. forest hill. Some refer to it as Vrishabadri as the hill looks like a bull while the other hills surrounding it look like cows.

Mahabharatham Vana Parvam says that Yudishtra, the eldest of the Pandavas came here on a pilgrimage. At that

time, this Alagarmalai was known as Vrushabadri. Vamana puranam also speaks about the greatness of Alagar Perumal and Nupura Ganga theertham. Brahmanda puranam also mentions about the Vrushabadri mahatyam and the greatness of Nupura Ganga theertham. Varaha puranam also deals with the various theertham in this hill and the greatness of this hill. Arjuna, another of the Pandava brothers is also said to have come on pilgrimage to this place as per the information given in Agneya puranam. Srivilliputtur sthala puranam, Jagannatha kshetra mahatyam, Sanath Kumara Samhitam, Brahma Samhitam and other puranas also refer to the greatness of this kshetra. The Goda parinayam, a book in Sanskrit which deals with wedding of Andal, mentions the fact that Perialwar along with Kothai i.e. Andal came to Thirumalliruncholai and that Perialwar extolled in detail the greatness of Sundararaja Perumal, the presiding deity of Alagar koil. Kurattalwar, the disciple of Ramanuja who lost his eye sight due to the heinous act committed by his enemies is said to have composed a number of songs in praise of the presiding deity of Alagar malai and regained his eye sight. This fact is mentioned in Sundara Bahustavam written by Kurattalwar himself. Skanda puranam also mentions about Pazhamudirsolai. The Skanda puranam in Tamil refers to this hill as follows:

"Mukti tharum Perazhagar Tirumalai" i.e. the holy hill where the beautiful Lord who gives moksha resides. Perialwar, Andal, Nammalwar, Thirumangai Alwar, Pey Alwar, Bhuttatalwar all the six Alwars have sung 128 pasurams in praise of this hill and the Lord of this hill Azhagar.

Arunagirinathar in his Tiruppugazh has referred to this hill as Pazhamudirsolai as also Solaimalai. But he describes this place only as the home where Lord Muruga resides. He does not refer to any vaishnavite shrine in existence in that place. Azhagia Manavala Dasar i.e. Pillai Perumal Iyengar has described the Alagar residing in Thirumalliruncholai in his Alagar Andaadi. This Alagar Andaadi forms part of Ashta Prabhadham written by Pillai Perumal Iyengar. Vempathur Swami Kavi Kalarudrar has also composed a song in Pillai Tamil on this Alagar. Another poet viz. Kavi Kunjaram Iyer has written a book known as Alagar

Kalambakam. In that book he says that the hills were always resounding with the rendering of the vedas and the rendering of the Divya prabandham of the Alwars. It is also said that a poet by name Balapattai Chockanathan Pulavar belonging to the 17th century wrote a book known as Alagar Killai Vidu Doothu" In order to enable him to write that book, the Nayak king of that time gave him certain gifts of land i.e. manyam. Kavi Kunjara Bharathi in his Solai malai Kuravanji also refers to the greatness of this Alagar malai and describes the beauty of that hill in great detail. Sri Hamsa Sañdesam, Sundararaja Stotiram, 108 Tirupati Andhaadhi, Divya Soori charitham and other books also deal with the beauty of this hill. The koil olugu which deals with the Srirangam temple also refers to this place when it says that when the Mohemadans invaded Srirangam twice, Ranganathar was brought over to Alagar malai and kept safe inside the fortress, in a well.

Thus, the puranas as well as the contemporary literary master pieces refer to the greatness of this place and its theerthams. One story is that the Madurai Tamil Sangam was started by Sundararaja Perumal. Kalambakathar refers to Sundararaja Perumal as "Tamizh Thazhai Tinai" and as "Tamizh Sanga Thani iraivanae". What is more about 2000 years ago a person by name Idaikadar set up a sidha medical unit here as the hill is said to be full of rare medical herbs.

The Tamil literary masterpiece viz. Silappadikaram refers to this temple as well as the theerthams in this hill. It is interesting to recall, though it be in brief, the reference to this place in Silappadikaram. In that book it is clearly mentioned that Azhagar malai is enroute between the Chola capital of Uraiyur and the Pandyan capital of Madurai. In the Silappadikaram story, a brahmin who had worshipped Azhagar at Thirumaliruncholai and was proceeding to Thiruvaramangam, enroute met Kovalan and Kannagi, the hero and the heroine of Silappadikaram. The couple were going to Madurai. When the pilgrims met, they started exchanging information about the pilgrim centres. The brahmin told Kovalan and Kannagi about the greatness of Azhagar malai and efficacy of offering prayers at that shrine. He gives them in detail the direction to reach the

mountain. He advises them to follow the forest path on the left side till they reach Thirumal kunru. He says that in that kunru, there is an underground path and in that pathway, there will be three theerthams known as Punya sravana theertham, Bavakarini theertham, Ishtasiddhi theertham. The brahmin said that whoever has a bath in Punya sravana theertham will be able to master Indra vyakaranam, a book written by Lord Indra. A bath in Bavakarini theertham will confer great intelligence on the devotee and bless him with the ability to recall one's past births. A bath in Ishtasiddhi theertham, he continued, will ensure that the wishes of the devotees are fulfilled. The brahmin advised Kovalan and Kannagi to circle the mountain three times and then take to the underground path. He said when they enter the underground passage a lady will appear before them on the banks of Silambaru and will pose the following question:

*"Immaikkum marumakkum immai marumai irandum inri
Ekkalaththum perinbam tharuvadhu yadhu?"*

Literally translated this question is as follows:

"what is the joy which is neither this world nor the other world but gives joy for ever?" Once that question is satisfactorily answered, the lady will show the underground passage. As one continues walking in that passage, one will come across another opening with two doors, when one crosses that doorway, yet another lady will appear and ask "Azhiyadha inbam edhu?" i.e. What is the everlasting happiness? If a reply which satisfies the lady is given, then she will herself guide the pilgrims to the three theerthams mentioned earlier. the pilgrims were then advised to repeat either the Panchaksharam or the Ashtakshara mantram and have a dip in the holy theerthams. They will then be surely blessed by God. The brahmin pilgrim then continued and said if Kovalan and Kannagi did not wish to take the underground passage, it would be enough if they just meditated on the divine lotus feet of the Perumal seen in a standing posture on the top of the hill. The Lord will then appear with His Garuda kodi i.e. Garuda flag. At that time the brahmin said all their problems will be resolved and they will be assured of moksha.

This is the detailed account that one gets about Azhagar malai and the significance of worshipping the Perumal there. Today the three theerthams mentioned in Silappadikaram are not to be seen. However, Silambaru or Nupuru Ganga and other theerthams are very much in existence.

The hill has got number of caves. About 2000 years ago when Buddhism and Jainism spread in these parts, apparently the Buddhists and Jainists monks stayed in these caves and did tapas. As evidence we find in some of the caves inscriptions which are the sasanas written by these monks.

The alwars also praise the glory of this mountain. Some of them refer to it as Then Tirupathi. Other say that this place is as holy as Tirupparkadal where Parandama is seen in a sayana pose lying on the cosmic ocean. One of the Alwars says that even as the head is the important part of the body so also amongst all Tirupathis, Azhagarmalai is the most important kshetram. Six alwars have sung exclusively about the glory and the beauty of Azhagarmalai. However, all the six alwars have composed 128 pasurams in praise of this divya desam and the Perumal residing here.

The Perumal who is residing in this hill once upon a time appeared to Markandeya and Ambarishi maharaja. These two devotees stayed in this hill for nearly 350 years, did tapas and meditated on the myriad divya namas of Sri Sundararaja Perumal. God was pleased with their devotion, and He appeared before them along with Sridevi and Bhoodevi seated on His Garuda vahanam. He blessed Markandeya with nityatvam i.e. to say He conferred on Markandeya rishi the boon of staying for ever near God. Ambarisha Maharaja was blessed with mukthi. This story was said to have been repeated by Janaka Maharaja to Vamadevar in Vamana puranam while relating about Vrushabadri mahatyam.

The moolavar here is seen facing east. He is seen in a standing posture or stanaka posture. He is known as Azhagar. The idol is very majestic and attractive figure. The moolavar is known Paramaswami. He is seen holding in His hand the discus

in a prayoga form. Consequently the sannidya of the Lord is one of very great majestic potentiality. The utsavar is known as Sundararaja Perumal. The thayar is known as Sundaravalli as also Sridevi. The most important theertham is Nupura Ganga also known as Silambu aru. The sthala viruksham is chandana viruksham i.e. sandalwood tree. The vimanam is known as Somasundara vimanam. The moolavar as well as the utsavar are seen having the panchayudhams in their hands. Perumal appeared to Malayadwaja Pandyan as well as Dharmadeva.

The utsava murthi is made out of a particular type of gold known as Aparanji. There is only one other idol made out of Aparanji and that is the utsava vigraham at Thiruvananthapuram Padmanabha Swami koil. This utsava murthi is referred to in the divya prabandham as Malai Arasar. In Sanskrit He is known as Vrushabdreesar as also Vrushabdrinathar. Even the chakram held by the utsava vigraham is in the prayoga form. The utsava murthi is given thirumanjanam bath only with water brought from Nupura Ganga. An inexplicable fact is that if water from any other area is used for the abishekam, the idol turns black. the reason for this is not known. This utsavamurthi idol is a fine example of very superior craftsmanship.

Once upon a time, Dharmaputra the eldest of the Pandu sons visited all the kshetrams in this world, and reached Thirumaliruncholai. Looking at the beauty of the evergreen hills which looked like bhooloka vaikuntam, he spent thousands of years in that place doing tapas. Sundararaja Perumal appeared before him and in keeping with the wishes of Dharmadeva, he agreed to stay on the banks of Nupura Ganga so as to enable all the people to worship Him. Dharmaputra built the temple in that place. It is said that one night he saw the beautiful full moon in the sky and adopted the form of the moon for the vimana for the temple. He ordered the divine architect Visvakarma to construct the temple. Thus it was that on the banks of Nupura Ganga underneath arasa maram. Visvakarma built Somasanda vimanam. Thus, it was that Sriman Narayana along with Sridevi and Bhoodevi decided to reside and give darshan to the devotees at Azhagar malai.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to the story of Malayadwaja, the Pandya king. It is told in Vamana mahatmyam. Indradyuman belonging to the Chandra vamsam had a son by name Malayadwajan. This son was born after performing a Puthra kameshti yagam and receiving the blessing of Perumal. Malayadwajan had mastered many sastras. He possessed very many good qualities. He was a warrior. He was very intelligent. He conquered all the kingdoms to the south of Meru parvatham and having established his name in Meru parvatham he returned to Madurai. He appointed Agastya muni as his minister and ruled for nearly thousand years. Thanks to the blessing Agastya rishi, He was the proud possessor of a pushpaka vimanam. Everyday he would use that vimanam to fly to Ganga river, have his bath there, visit Gaya, worship Mahavishnu there and then return to Madurai. One day the shadow of his vimanam was cast on Vrishabadri. The great sages and rishis doing tapas in Vrushabadri caught hold of that shadow and were able to pull the vimanam down, to the Azhagar malai. At that time, an asareeri voice related to him the greatness of the hill and the presence of Sriman Narayanan in that place. Perumal appeared before him and told him that in that mountain there is a holy theertham known as Silambaru. It owes its origin to the water that Lord Brahma used for washing the feet of Vishnu. He said that Silambaru was more holy than even river Ganga and He therefore advised Malayadwajan to have his bath in Silambaru and get rid of all his sins. Hearing this, Malayadwajan stayed on in the Azhagar malai and followed the advice given by Perumal. He was responsible for building a number of mandapas, prakarams and gopurams in the temple. He also arranged for celebrating a number of festivals. He had golden utsava idols made. Later, he entrusted his kingdom to his son Chandra kethu and attained moksha after praying to the Perumal at Azhagar koil. After some time, the son of Chandra kethu, Kupja Pandyan ascended the throne. He did not have any sons. He worshipped Vrushabdrinathan and did tapas in Azhagar koil. God was pleased with this tapas and he blessed that Parvati devi will be born as the daughter to the king, Kupja Pandyan. Accordingly, in due course, Kupja Pandyan had a daughter who was none other than the reincarnation of Parvathi devi. She was known as Tadataka Piratti. She also

ruled the kingdom and in one of the battles, she was defeated by Somasundara Pandyan. Somasundara Pandyan was none other than Lord Siva Himself. Parvati and Siva got married and the story goes that they stayed on in Madurai.

The most famous theertham in this place is Nupura Ganga. It is said to have originated from the Silambu i.e. the anklet of Perumal. Bali Chakravarthi, grand-son of Prahlada did tapas and had obtained a boon that he would be master of the three worlds viz. Swarga loka, Earth and the Pathala lokam. He also got a boon that he would not be killed by anybody. Once he fought the Devas and annexed Deva loka. The devas approached Lord Vishnu and sought protection from this asura chakravarthi. In order to help them, Lord Vishnu was born as a son to Kasyapa muni. He had an appearance of a Vamanan, a dwarf. The rest of the story is too well known to bear repetition. Vamana asked for three feet of land, Bali agreed, the Lord immediately assumed a majestic form (viswaroopa) He covered the three worlds with two steps and kept the third step on the head of Bali Chakravarthi and pushed him to the under world. This was the rescue operation of the Perumal in His Thiruvikrama avatar. It is said that as Thiruvikrama when His foot reached Brahmaloaka, Brahma washed that foot with water from His Kamandalam. Drops of water which fell on the anklet worn by Lord Vishnu spilt over on Vrushabadri mountain and got converted as Silambaru. This holy river has been worshipped by many sages and rishis and as it fulfilled their wishes, it is also known as Ishtasiddhi.

Once upon a time, a rishi by name Suthapas immersed himself in the water and was doing japa. At that time, Durvasa came there and was waiting on the river bank. Even after a long time Suthapas muni did not come out and pay respect to Durvasa. Durvasa therefore felt offended and cursed that Suthapas rishi should become a frog. Hearing this curse, Suthapas rishi came out of the river in a hurry and sought forgiveness at the feet of Durvasa. Durvasa said that having cursed him, he had no power to recall the curse. He however assured him that if he goes to varaha parvatham and stayed in that mountain for twelve years the hill will be henceforth be known as Manduka

parvatham and the theertham in that hill will be known as Manduka theertham and that the rishi could have his bath in Nupura Ganga, pray to Sundararaja Perumal and be redeemed from the curse. Accordingly Suthapa rishi went to Azhagar koil, stayed in that mountain for twelve years, had his bath in Nupura Ganga and was blessed by Sundararaja Perumal.

The exact place of origin of Nupura ganga cannot be pin pointed. Once can only see the water gushing out via Gomukhi near Madhavi Mantapam. It is believed that this theertham has got medicinal curative properties. It has iron and copper and so cures many diseases. As it flows down the hill, it finally reaches the tanks and the fields at the base of Azhagar malai. The water is very sweet and hence it is known as Tenaru (river of honey).

There are some other equally famous theerthams in this place. First is the Hanuman theertham. It is about one and quater mile from the temple. There is also a temple for Hanuman near that theertham. Next is Garuda theertham which also has a temple for Garuda. Third is Pandava theertham. On the northern side of hill there is a big water fall which is known as Aruvi theertham. Very near the temple to the north of the temple is utara Narayana vaavi, another theertham. It is from that Narayana vaavi that water is collected for performing the abishekam to all the deities of this temple, other than Azhagar. That water is also used in the kitchen for preparing neivedhyams for the temple. But for performing thirumanjanam to Azhagar, water is brought only from Nupura Ganga theertham. During Chaitrotsava festival also when Azhagar goes all the way from Thirumaliruncholai to Madurai, about 12 miles away and stays in Vandiyoor, even then water for the bath of the Perumal is carried all the way from Nupura Ganga daily. It is said that if any water other than the water from Nupura Ganga is used, the idol turns black.

There are various other sannidhis in this temple precincts. A brief account of some of those sannidhis is given in the following paragraphs.

The first of such sannidhis is the one for Bhairava. Close to the Visvaksenar sannidhi, an idol of Bhairava can be seen. He is the kshetra palaka of this area. The idol has got long tusks and claw like teeth and is seen holding a trisulam and riding a dog. Bhairava is one who emerged from the blood of Lord Siva. Usually he is given a place of prominence only in Saivite temples. But in this vaishnavite divya desam he is given equal prominence. This point speaks volumes about the religious tolerance exercised by our predecessors. There is an interesting story connected with the Bhairavar sannidhi. As soon as the ardha jama pooja is completed in Azhagar koil, the doors are closed and the keys are kept in front of the kshetra palaka sannidhi i.e. Bhairavar sannidhi. Only then the bhattar will return to his house. The next morning when he comes, the key is collected from the Bhairava kshetra palaka sannidhi. One day after closing the doors of Azhagar koil and placing the keys in front of Bhairavar sannidhi, the priest left for home. But he realised that by mistake he had locked his son in the main temple. He immediately rushed back to the Bhairavar sannidhi, wanted to pick up the keys from the Kshetra palaka. But the Kshetra palaka would not allow him to take the keys, But assured him that the child will be safe. However, the priest would not listen and he insisted on opening the temple doors. The Kshetra palaka got angry. He caught hold of the child and threw it out. The priest therefore got angry and he cursed that the kshetra palaka will loose part of his sakthi i.e. power. He threw out the sakthi i.e. the force, to a stone outside. That stone is even to-day pointed out to the devotees as the kshetra palakar stone.

The sannidhi of the thayar is also equally important. The thayar is known as Kalyana Sundaravalli. The idol is very beautiful to look at.

In the Andal sannidhi, the utsava murthi is seen in a beautiful sitting posture. This is very rare apoorva seva. Nowhere else do we see such a posture. On the day of wedding of Andal with sundaraja Perumal one can see Sreedevi, Bhoodevi, Kalayana Sundara valli all together. That is a very rare darshan. It can be had only in this kshetram.

The sannidhi for Sundarsana in this temple is regarded as very powerful. There is an idol of Yoga Narasimhar in the western prakaram of the temple. Lord Narasimha is seen in a fierce angry mood. He is known as Jwala Narasimha. In order to allow the kopagni i.e. flame of anger, to fly away from the top of his head, in the sannidhi in the place above the head of the idol there is a big opening (Gaping hole). Further, to lessen the anger, everyday, the idol is given a bath in milk, oil, curds with water drawn from Nupura Ganga. The expenses for this daily abishakam to Lord Narasimha is met from an endowment made about hundred years ago by Pachaiyappa Mudaliar. This is mentioned in one of the inscriptions on the stones in the Padinettam padi gopuram.

Another important sannidhi in this Azhagar malai is the Sri Sadirala Madavar sannidhi. This is a sannidhi for seven female deities known as Saptha matrikas viz. Brahmi, Maheswari, Kowmari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Mahindri, and Chamundi. These seven thayars of the respective Lords viz. Brahma, Maheswaran, Kaumaran. Vishnu, Varaha, Mahendra and Indra sport the sakthi belonging to their husbands as also the ayudhams i.e. weapons belonging to their husband. Daily pooja is performed to these seven deities.

The Rakkayee Amman sannidhi in Azhagar malai is regarded as the sannidhi of the Adi Devata i.e. Prime goddess in this hill. She is the daughter of Angireesa muni. On Amavasai day i.e. new moon day a special pooja is performed to this deity.

Next only to Azhagar the most venerated deity in this hill is Karuppanna swami. This deity is believed to have been brought from the north. This explains the peculiar practice of when worship is offered to this deity by the poojari he always stands facing north. There are several forms for this deity. They are known as Periya Karuppan (Big Karuppan), Siriya Karuppan (little Karuppan), Mandai Karuppan (Head Karuppan), Thotti Karuppan (Sweeper karuppan), Kumutti Karuppan (Stove karuppan), Pazhaya Karuppan (Old Karuppan), etc. Amongst all these forms the most important one is the one in which he is seen in Azhagar malai when he is known as the

18th step Karuppanna Swamy (Padinettam Padi Karuppanna swamy). He is known as Krishna Puthiran. In this sannidhi in Azhagar koil, he has no identifiable form. There are eighteen steps which lead to the mani gopuram. The doors of that gopuram are regarded as Karuppanna swami, the deity. Pooja is offered to the doors. The idol of Karuppanna swami in the other places is usually depicted holding a hook or a sword or a mace or a spear. He will also be wearing slippers for his feet. He will look fierce with a frightening demeanour, Like that of a warrior on the battle field. But in Azhagar koil it is the doors on the 18th step which is regarded as the deity. These doors are said to be made of sandalwood. Kumkumam and garland will be offered to the doors. Camphor will be lighted and pooja performed to the doors. The offerings like pongal, black gram cake (vadai), cocoanuts etc. are given to this deity. Vibhoodi is offered as prasadam. The priests of the main temple are not the poojaris of this temple. The temple servants of the main temple belonging to the kuyavar kulam act as the poojaris. This door at the end of the 18th step is opened only very rarely. As for example during Brahmotsavam time when the Chakrattalwar will be taken out in procession through that gate.

Great is the awe and veneration in which this deity is held. There is a belief that nobody dare utter a lie in this sannidhi. Very often civil, criminal and revenue cases are decided on oaths taken at this door step. The courts of Madurai, Ramnad, and Tirunelveli send the parties here to take the oath in front of Karuppanna swami. Most of the cases are generally settled amicably at the last moment when oath is about to be taken, for the parties are in such a dread of the wrath of the deity that they will not swear a false oath. Taking of an oath before this sannidhi is a custom which is several centuries old. Everyday water is brought from Nupura Ganga to Azhagar. That abisheka theertham is first kept before Karuppanna swamy and after swearing that it was truly brought from Nupura Ganga, it is taken inside the precincts of the main temple.

There is a story connected with this 18th step God. Once a king of Kerala wanted to carry away Sundararaja Perumal of Azhagar koil to his kingdom and offer worship to Him there. As

Azhagapuri fortress was heavily guarded, he hit upon a plan to stealthily carry away this idol. He therefore selected 18 persons well versed in mantras and tantras and sent them to Azhagar koil, with the sole objective of taking away the Sundararaja vigraham. These 18 tantris became invisible and tried to carry away the vigraha. But they could not succeed. They then decided to use their mantra sakthi and transfer the power of Azhagar from his vigraham to another vigraham and carry away that second vigraham to Kerala. But the people equally well versed in mantras and tantras residing in Azhagar hill came to know about this plan and they caught those eighteen people, buried them alive underneath every one of the eighteen steps and thus put an end to their evil plan. It is said that one of small deities who came with the 18 sorcerers ultimately changed his mind and said he would permanently stay in front of the gopura vasal and ensure that the property of the temple is kept safe. It agreed to stand guard over the temple. In return it asked that everyday the ardha jama nirmalya neivedhyam offered to Azhagar be given to him also. The bhattars agreed. Even today this practice of offering the nirmalya neivedhyam to the main deity first and then to the deity guarding the 18th step is performed without fail. As this 18th step Karuppanna swamy has become the protector of Azhagar, whenever Azhagar goes out, as for example in the month of Chitirai when He goes to witness the Meenakshi kalyanam at Madurai, all the ornaments worn by Azhagar are listed out and read out to this Karuppanna Swamy. When Azhagar returns to the hill the same list is verified and only then Azhagar is allowed to enter His temple! The keys of this treasury (pokkisham) of the temple are every night brought by the bhattar and kept in front of the Karuppanna swami. Nobody other than the bhattar will dare to touch it till next day morning. By mistake if anybody were to touch it, it is believed that the deity will punish such a person without any mercy. Even today these scenes which speak of the awe in which this deity is held, can be witnessed. A special festival for this deity is celebrated on Aadi Amavasai and Aadi Pournami days.

There are various beautiful sights in the areas surrounding this temple. No story relating to Azhagar will be complete without mentioning atleast in brief about the sights and scenic splendour of this place. One such beauty spot is Madhavi mandapam. Enroute to Nupura Ganga, there is a Kanu mandapam, then Hanumar theertham, followed by Garuda theertham. Then one reaches Madhavi mandapam which is just before the place of origin of Nupura Ganga. The scenic beauty of this place is breath taking. Madhavi stands for jasmine creepers. Once upon a time this mandapam was full of jasmine creepers. Today, in this mandapam there are a number of stone inscriptions which stand mute evidence to the early origin and existence of this mandapam. The Pandyas and the Nayak rulers must have renovated this mandapam as a number of sculpted pieces of Nayakar and Pandyan kings are seen lying about in this mandapam.

Another unique place is known as Pancha Pandavar Padukkai i.e. bed room of the Pancha pandavas. This is a cave which lies about half a mile to the east of Azhagar koil. The path to reach this cave is rather difficult and risky. In some places one has to bend almost double and crawl through the mountainous path. The cave is on the top of the hill known as Kazhugu malai i.e. Eagle hill. The water here is very sweet. There is a big banyan tree in front of the cave. A view of the plains from that cave is beautiful beyond description. Inside the cave there are stone slabs five in number. Each slab is about six to nine feet long and 2 to 3 feet broad. The local story is that Pancha Pandavas once used these five slabs for sleeping. There are certain stone inscriptions in Brahmi script belonging to the 3rd century available inside this cave. These inscriptions make one conclude that the Jains and the Buddhist monks lived here and inscribed these writings. As to when, how and why this cave used by the jains and the Buddhists monks got the name Pancha Pandava Padukkai is a mystery.

Now a few words about the important festivals of this temple. The most important of the festivals celebrated in this temple is the Chithirai Pournami Thiruvizha. On the same day in Madurai also the wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar is celebrated with all pomp. It is said that once this wedding of

Meenakshi and Sundareswarar was celebrated in the month of Masi, while the festival in Azhagar koil used to be celebrated in Chithirai. But Tirumalai Nayak king of Madura felt that these two utsavams could be celebrated in one month to suit the convenience of the pilgrims. From that time, the Chithirai Thiruvizha festival is celebrated at the same time in Madurai as well as in Azhagar malai.

The Chithirai festival is a grand one. The festival is celebrated for about nine days. The first four days it is celebrated in the Azhagar hill itself. On the fourth day Azhagar leaves for Madurai and on the 9th day He returns back to His hill. Meantime, He stays in Vaigai river bed for three days. At that time huge crowds throng to have a darshan of the Perumal in different alankaras. In the nights there will be fire works.

There is a story connected with this festival. It has got no bearing either in the sastras or in the puranas. However it is widely believed in this area and hence bears repetition. The story is that Azhagar i.e. Lord Vishnu heard of His sister, Parvathy's wedding with Sundareswarar. He therefore decided to leave Azhagar koil to witness the wedding! He dons the dress of Kal Azhagar. It is 12 miles between Azhagar koil and Madurai. Enroute the divine convoy stops in Mani mandapam. Finally, it reaches Perumal koil in Thallakulam. Huge crowds anticipating the arrival of Kallazhagar will be waiting at Thallakulam. This is known as Kallazhagar Edir sevai i.e. welcoming sevai. That night there will be fire works representing the celebration of the people and their joy in seeing Kallazhagar. The next day early in the morning the Lord leaves Thallakulam. He is seated on a horse vahanam (Kudirai vahanam). Before he starts towards Vaigai river, a basle (Tulasi) garland, from Srivilliputtur Andal koil will be received and Kallazhagar will wear that garland and only then proceed to Vaigai river bed. This symbolic wearing of the garland sent by Andal to Perumal, is performed without fail every year. Once He reaches the Vaigai river bed, Viraraghava Perumal of Madurai comes to receive him. This incident is referred to as Azhagar Attril Irungudhal i.e. Azhagar getting into river bed. Lakhs of pilgrims assemble in the river bed to witness this festival. The Perumal then follows the river, reaches

Vandiyoora and stays there for the night. There is a function known as "Ilaippari Saithyopasaram". This means nothing else but a festival to refresh the Perumal after His long travel and consequential travails and weariness of journey. The next day the Perumal is seated on a sesha vahanam. He goes to Tenur mandapam. He is then placed on a golden Garuda vahanam when He blesses Manduka maharishi with moksham. That night He goes to Ramrayar mandapam and gives darshan to the devotees in His Dasavathara forms. The next day early in the morning Azhagar is dressed in Mohini avatar and He reaches Mysore mandapam. He is then dressed as Kallazhagar, gets into a flower palanquin. The next day early in the morning He gets back to His abode in Azhagar hill. Then Sattu murai is performed. With this the Chaitra festival comes to an end.

The other famous festival in this temple is Margazhi Thirunal. In the month of Margazhi (corresponding to the later half of December and the first of January) Margazhi vizha is celebrated. The Pagal pattu and Rapattu utsavams take place. On the 8th day Azhagar gives darshan seated on the golden horse. It is known as Thanga Kudirai vahanam. As Andal married Kallazhagar in this place, the margazhi festival assumes special significance. The wedding takes place on Panguni Uthiram day.

Sculptures:-

The sculptures found in abundance in this temple are real poems in stone. The Tirumalai Nayakar mandapam has the idol of Tirumalai Nayakar, his queen and his brother Muthialai Nayakar. These idols are beautifully carved on the pillars. The statue of Tirumalai Nayakar is the most beautiful one, of the great king, found anywhere in Madurai.

In the elephant vahana mandapam there are delicately carved images depicting the incarnations of Vishnu. Some of them are said to be better than the workmanship found on similar pillars in the famous Meenakshi temple at Madurai. The notable sculptures in this place are those of Lord Narasimha, Krishna, Rathi on the parrot, Manmadha and Vishnu on Garuda. In the Kalyana mandapam of this temple there are beautiful sculptures of the kings who ruled over these places. They are

life size sculptures.

Epigraphical Highlights:-

This temple abounds in inscriptions. The inscriptions relating to various dynasties found in this temple throws light on the antiquity of this place. Some rare inscriptions in Brahmi language date back to the glorious reign of Asoka. These are found in the Pancha pandava cave. It is believed that Ajjanandi, the famous jain teacher and his colleagues once occupied this cave. The inscription of the later period found in the Sundarapandiya mandapam. Number of inscriptions relating to the endowments made to the temple by various kings are also to be seen. Let us now briefly record a few of the important inscriptions and their contents.

There are plenty of inscriptions available in this temple. An attempt will therefore be made in this chapter to only highlight some of the important inscriptions so as to clothe the story of this divya desam with select historical interesting pieces of information.

On a pillar in the Ariyan mandapam in the inner prakara of the Sundararaja temple, there is an inscription which says that the 18th mandapam was built for Azhagar Perumal by Raghavaraja. A figure in worshipping posture is sculpted above this inscription. Apparently, he is the donor.¹

On the southern wall of the Mettu Krishnan Mandapam in the second prakaram of the same temple, there is an inscription relating to the Pandya times which says that the Perumal Thirumandapam was constructed by Sundara Pandya.²

On the northern wall of the Padinettu padi gopuram in front of the Azhagar koil there is an inscription relating to the Vijayanagar period. It registers a gift of land for supplying lotus garlands to the Azhagar temple. The gift was made for the merit

¹ Inscription No.83 Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy (ARIE) 1928 Appendix B

² Inscription No.84 ARIE 1928 Appendix B

of the mother of the donor.³

On the same northern wall there is yet another inscription which records another gift of land in Karichcheri by Kondu Settiyar to the temple for providing offerings to the Lord.⁴

On the same northern wall of the Padinettu padi gopuram, there is an inscription which registers a gift of a village on the northern bank of the Vaigai river by one Visvanatha Nayaka to the temple. This gift was made for the merit of Achchuta deva Maharaya, the then king.⁵

Yet another inscription of the same wall records the gift of some gardens by one Ranga Iyengar of Irappoor for the supply of cocoanuts, plantains, etc. to the temple. This also relates to the period of Achchuta deva Maharaya, the Vijayanagara king.⁶

On the southern wall of the same Padinettu padi gopuram, there is yet another inscription relating to the period of Krishnadeva Maharaya, the Vijayanagara king which registers the gift of two villages Samayanallur and Sattamangalam on the banks of Vaigai river for providing offerings to the Perumal during the car procession in the month of Adi.⁷

Yet another inscription on the southern wall relating to the period of Venkata deva Maharaya, a Vijayanagara king registers gift of Ramanuja Nalur by the king for feeding 12 Sri Vaishnavites in the Azhagar temple.⁸

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in Kallazhagar temple in this divya desam says that the Thirumandapam was constructed by one

³ Inscription No.86 ARIE 1928 Appendix B

⁴ Inscription No.87 ARIE 1928 Appendix B

⁵ Inscription No.88 ARIE 1928 Appendix B

⁶ Inscription No.89 ARIE 1928-29 Appendix B

⁷ Inscription No.90 ARIE 1928-29 Appendix B

⁸ Inscription No.91 ARIE 1928-29 Appendix B

Munaiyadaraiyan of Kullurkudi. ⁹

On the northern wall of the first prakara outside Azhagar koil there is an inscription relating to the Pandya period. This records a gift of a flower garden near a spring on the hill by one Raman Kannapiran for supplying garlands to the temple on ordinary and festival days. The donor also made a gift of money to the temple for supply of food to the person who looked after the garden.¹⁰

On the same northern wall, there is an inscription relating to the period of Pandyan king Tribhuvana Chakravartin Konerinmaikondan which records provision for daily supply of offered food i.e. prasadam to the person looking after the flower garden. This gift was made by Akalankarayan of Kanchipuram in Thondai mandalam to the temple of Paramsvamin at Thirumaliruncholai..¹¹

There are many other inscriptions on the same wall. One such records a royal order handing over to the temple, the taxes of the lands grouped together in the village known as Chera Narayanapuram.¹²

Another inscription registers an order issued at the request of Malavarayar by king Jatavarman remitting the taxes on the lands in the village Thirumalai Udiyan vilagam. The remitted amount was to meet the expenses of worship and offerings in the temple. ¹³

Another inscription registers sale of land at Idaikattur by one Kalaveli Nadalwan to one Pallavarayar. The said Pallava Rayar was to pay taxes thereon to the temple and the taxes so paid were to be handed over to the temple for its maintenance.¹⁴

⁹ Inscription No.270 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁰ Inscription No.271 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹¹ Inscription No.272 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹² Inscription No.273 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹³ Inscription No.275 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁴ Inscription No.276 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

Another inscription relating to the reign of the Pandya king Tribhuvana chakravartin Konerinmaikondan records grant of land free of taxes for feeding Tridandi sanyasins and Ekangi Sri vaishnavas in the temple. ¹⁵

Yet another inscription relating to the period of the Pandya king Jatavarman records remitting of taxes of certain lands in Rajarajanallur for feeding the brahmins in the Kulasekhara matha in the temple during certain festivals in the month of Adi Ippasi and Margazhi. ¹⁶

Yet another inscription on the western wall of the first prakara outside the Azhagar koil records a royal order issued by the king Tribhuvana chakravartin Pandya deva. It says that the king remitted taxes on certain lands to enable the beneficiary to maintain the channel dug by him. ¹⁷

Yet another inscription on the same western wall of the first prakara of the temple relating to the period of Tribhuvana chakravartin Maikondan Pandya king mentions that one Sadaigopadasan of Idaikattur supplied Yagnopaveetham to the temple and received remuneration therefore. ¹⁸

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the same prakara registers gift of two villages for providing offerings during festivals for feeding Sri vaishnavas who chant the sacred hymns during the 10 days of the festival in the month of Adi. ¹⁹

On the same eastern wall another inscription refers to the settlement of a dispute between Tirumalai Anda Iyengar regarding the privilege of getting the theeftha in the temple on certain festival occasions. ²⁰

¹⁵ Inscription No.277 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁶ Inscription No.279 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁷ Inscription No.282 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁸ Inscription No.284 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁹ Inscription No.285 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

²⁰ Inscription No.286 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

Another inscription on the same eastern wall relating to the period of Maravarman Pandyan king records a royal order remitting taxes on lands in Rajacholamani chathurvedimangalam so as to enable lighting of eight perpetual lamps in the temple.²¹

Yet another inscription on the eastern wall of the mandapa in front of the Chakrattalwar shrine in Azhagar koil relating to the period of the Pandya king Tribhuvana chakravatin Konerinmaikondan records provision for burning lamps in front of the image of Tiruvazhi Azhwar on the hill.²²

Another inscription on the wall of the western veranda in front of the Chakarattalwar shrine records a royal order during the rule of the Pandyan king Jatavarman remitting taxes on certain lands purchased by one Kalingarayar for the purpose of digging a channel for growing red lillys.²³

Another inscription registers additional gift of land for the up keep of the channel mentioned in the above inscription as the previous gift was found to be inadequate.²⁴

Another inscription on the same wall states that the accountants of the temple agreed to burn a lamp in the temple from the interest earned on 11 achchu received from a resident of Thirugoshtiyur in Kerala Singa Valanadu.²⁵

There are other inscriptions on the same wall which records gift of lands for growing flowers for the Perumal.²⁶

On the southern wall i.e. inside Sundarapandyan Mandapam in the Azhagar koil relating to the period of the Pandyan king Tribhuvana chakravartin Konerinmaikondan records an order said to have been issued by the deity while seated on the Mulavarayan- Tiruppallikattil in the Azhagiya Mandalan Thiru

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- 21 Inscription No.288 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B
 - 22 Inscription No.290 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B
 - 23 Inscription No.295 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B
 - 24 Inscription No.296 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B
 - 25 Inscription No.297 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B
 - 26 Inscription No.299,300 and 302 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

mandapam. It registers a gift of a house and some perquisites to a certain Tiruvalan for his having been instrumental in the building of mandapam in the temple.²⁷

Another interesting inscription on the eastern wall of the same mandapa states that several merchants of the 56 countries agreed to meet the expenses of worship to the image of Thiruvengadamudaiyan at Appan Tirupathi from the rates collected by them on different articles of merchandise. Apparently, this was nucleus of a sales tax collected by the merchants and part of it offered to meet the expenses of providing worship to the Perumal.²⁸

There are numerous inscriptions which refer to gift of land and remission of taxes thereon in order to provide for offerings to the temple.²⁹

An interesting inscription on the northern wall of the verandah round the central shrine in this Sundararaja Perumal relating to the Vijayanagara period states that the authorities of the temple of Azhagar koil agreed to confirm the duties and the privileges enjoyed in the temple by the Samaniyar and the Solaiyar of the several services. This agreement was made in the presence of the king.³⁰

Another inscription on the pillar of the mandapa in front of the Sundararaja Perumal shrine states that the Alankara mandapam was constructed by a farmer of Pullurkudi.³¹

Another inscription on the southern base of the same mandapam registers a part of free gift of the village Vilattur along with its hamlet for the sacred bath offerings, etc. of Azhagar Perumal when they are seated in the Sundarapandya mandapam, every month on the day of Uthiradam, the star of

²⁷ Inscription No.306 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

²⁸ Inscription No.309 ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

²⁹ Inscription No.313,317,318,319,320,321,323,326,328,329,330 of ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

³⁰ Inscription No.1 of ARIE 1931-32 Appendix B.

³¹ Inscription No.2 of ARIE 1931-32 Appendix B.

the king's elder brother.³²

There are numerous other inscriptions on the walls of this same mandapam which register gift of land, remission of taxes for meeting the expenses in the temple and for feeding Tridanti sanyasins in the temple.³³

On the northern wall of the third prakara of this temple there are numerous inscriptions which registers the gift of villages or contiguous land in order to meet the expenditure for worship in the temple.³⁴

Yet another inscription on the southern wall of the vahana mandapam in the temple registers the remission of taxes with effect from the fourteenth year of the king's rule on a particular village which was granted for the maintenance of the flower garden named after the king and for the provision of flowers on the processional days.³⁵

Yet another inscription found on the broken pillar lying in the third prakara in the Kallazhagar temple records an endowment to Thirumaliruncholai Azhagar.³⁶

On the jamb of the northern gateway in the outermost prakara states that the wall was the gift of Tiyyaganchiriyar Perumal.³⁷

A copper plate received from the trustee of the Sundararaja Perumal temple at Azhagar koil states that the elder brother of the king Vijayaraghunatha Sethupathideva residing at Utharkosamangai remitted half of the revenues from the villages Aykkudi and Sundanavoor for digging a tank between the temple and the Appan Tirupati.³⁸

³² Inscription No.8 of ARIE 1931-32 Appendix B.

³³ Inscription No.9,10,11,12 of ARIE 1931-32 Appendix B.

³⁴ Inscription 14, 16 of ARIE of 1931-32 Appendix B.

³⁵ Inscription No. 17 of ARIE 1931 -32 Appendix B.

³⁶ Inscription No. 218 of ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B.

³⁷ Inscription No. 220 of ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B.

³⁸ Copper Plate ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B.

Hymnology :

Bhoothath Alwar, Pay Alwar, Perialwar, Andal, Nammalwar and Thirumangai Alwar have sung 128 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. A few of such pasurams along with the song sung by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning are given below:-

Bhuttalwar:**Irاندam Thiruvendaadhi - 48th Pasurams:**

உணர்ந்தாய் மறை நான்கும் ஒதினைய் நீதி மணந்தாய்
மலர்மகள் தோள் மாலே - மணந்தாய் போய்
வேயிருஞ் சாரல் வியலிரு ஞாலம் சூழ்
மாயிருஞ் சோலை மலை.

Meaning :

You have given the four vedas and preached justice; Your celestial marriage with Mahalakshmi took place at Malirunsolai, at the foot of the mountain surrounded by bamboos and forests.

Payalwar:**Moondram Thiruvandaadhi - 61st Pasuram:**

பண்டெல்லாம் வேங்கடம் பாற்கடல் வைகுந்தம்
கொண்டு அங்கு உறைவாற்குக் கோயில் போல் வண்டு
வளங் குளரும் நீள் சோலை வண்புங் கடிகை
இளங் குமரன் தன் விண்ணகர்

Meaning:

Besides residing at Venkatam, Parkadal, for the benefit of those living in the thick forests humming with bees, You are residing at Thirumalirum solai, where Young kumaran (Muruga) also resides.

Perialwar Thirumozhi (4-3-2):

கஞ்சனும் கனியனும் கனிநு மருதும் எருதும்
வஞ்சனையில் மடிய வளர்ந்த மணிவண்ணன் மலை
நஞ்சுமிழ் நாகம் எழுந்தணிவி நளிர் மாமதியை
செஞ்சுடர் நாவளைக்கும் திருமாலிருஞ் சோலையதே

Meaning:

Thirumalirunsolai hill is the place where the vicious snake, spitting venom shoots its red lipped tongue at the full moon, so graciously sailing in the sky, along the mountain top. The snake mistakes the moon to be an article of food fit for eating.

At that hill resides Lord Krishna, the emerald hued Perumal; who grew up in Gokulam; who destroyed Kamsa; Kaliyan, and Kuvalyapaeetam, the rogue elephant; The asuram who took on the form of Maruda trees and Arishtasuram who took on the form of an ox.

Note: Alwar says Krishna is the Azhagar of Thirumalirunsolai.

Andal Nachiyar

Thirumozhi (9th Thirumozhi 1st song):

சிந்துரச் செம்பொடிப் போல் திருமாலைருஞ்
சோலை எங்கும்
இந்திர கோபங்களே எழந்தும் பரந்திட்டனவால்
மந்தரம் நாட்டி அன்று மதுரக் கொழுஞ் சாறு கொண்ட
சுந்தரத் தோளுடையான் சுழலையில்
நின்றுய்ந்துங் கொலோ.

Meaning:

I am verily caught in the beautiful net of the God, who has so kindly taken residence at Thirumalirunsolai; which is full of bright red coloured butterflies-when those winged creatures flit about in the air it appears as if the air is filled with the red Sindhur (auspicious kumkum powder).

That Perumal is also the one who married Mahalakshmi the quintessence of nectar - the most auspicious of all the things that emerged when the milky ocean was churned -

Is there any way in which I, the captive, could escape from the web of this beautiful shouldered (Azhagar) Lord?

No, there is no escape.

I better accept defeat and abjectly surrender.

Note: Azhavar Perumal is also known as Sundara Bahu i.e. person with beautiful enchanting limbs and body. For the rehtorical question posed by Andal the answer cannot be mistaken. There is neither possibility nor even a desire to get disentangled from the divine web of the sole saviour.

Nammalwar: Thiruvaimozhi (2-10-1):

கிளரொளி இளமை கெடுவதன் முன்னம்
வளரொளி மாயோன் மருவிய கோயில்
வளரிளம் பொழில் சூழ் மாலிருஞ்சோலை
தளர்வில ராகில் சாரிவது சதிரே.

Meaning:

The best thing to do before you loose the innocence of childhood and cross into the threshold of youth hood- is to go to Thirumaliruncholai which place is full of beautiful enchanting groves and where resides the Lord with the noble qualities and easy accessibility.

To allow yourmind to be distracted with other ephemeral attractions is undesirable, self deceiving and shortsightedly foolish.

(The best action is to seek refuge and surrender at the divine feet of the Perumal at Thirumalirunsholai).

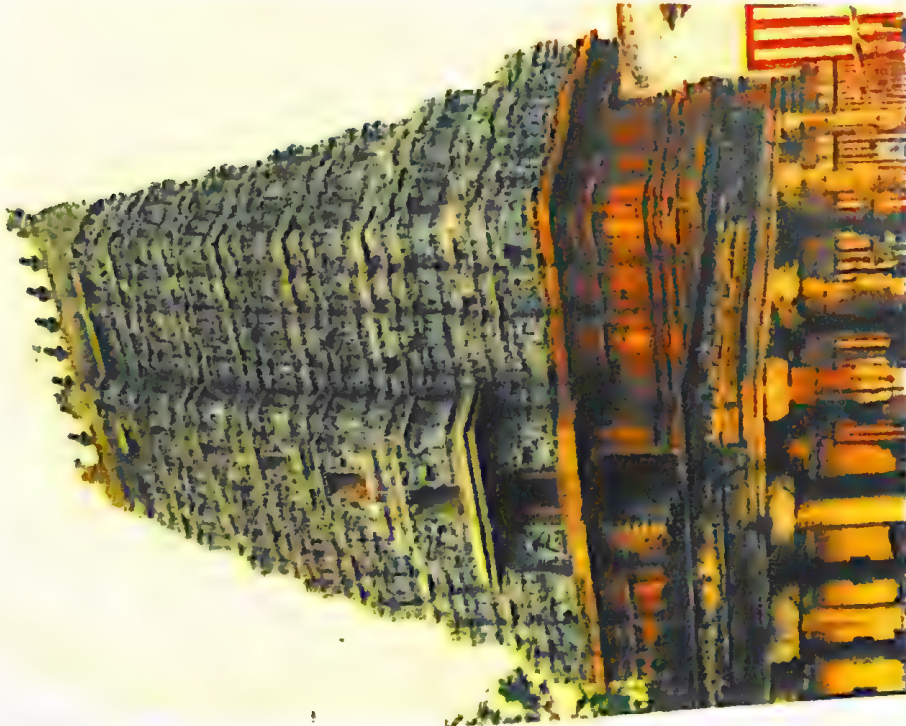
Thirumangai Alwar:

Peria Thirumozhi (4-9-2):

சிந்தை தள்ளிள் நீங்காதிருந்த திருவே! மருவினிய
மைந்தா! அந்த னுலி மாலே! சோலை மழகளிறே!
நந்தா விளக்கிள் கூடரே! நறையூர் நின்ற நம்பி! என்
எந்தாய்! இந்தனாராய்! அடியேற்கு இறையும்
இரங்காயே.



A View of the Azhagar's Procession to Madurai



Thirumalirunsolai Temple Tower



Thirumayan Utsavamoorthi



Thirumogur Kalamegha Perumal Utsava Moorthi

Meaning:

Oh you precious one who have taken permanent residence in and refuse to be shifted from my heart-

Oh great person, the more I move with you, the greater is my pleasure and happiness (i.e. to say familiarity does not lead to contempt when one is blessed with the rare opportunity to move with Him).

Oh you who reside in cool Thiruvali;

Oh you lovable majestic elephant calf of Thirumalirunsolai;

Oh you eternal flame with undiminished lustre;

Oh you Nambi Perumal standing at Thiru Naraiyur;

Oh my gracious parent;

Oh you who reside at Thiru Indalur;

Will you not, Oh lord, have some pity on me?

Divyakavi Pilai Perumal Iyengars

108 Tirupati Andaadhi:

பணிந்தேன் திருமாலை; பாமாலை தாளில்
அணிந்தேன்ச அருள் தஞ்சமாகத் துணிந்தேன்;
திருமாலிருஞ் சோலை சேர்ந்தேன்ச எனக்கு
வருமால், இருஞ் சோதி வான்.

Meaning:

I reached Thirumalirunsolai divya desam where Azhagar resides. I worshipped Azhagar. I placed at His divine feet the garland of songs in Tamil prasing Him and sought refuge and protection at His divine feet, hoping that I will attain the glorious and bright Paramapadam i.e. heaven (Poigai Alwar expresses similar thought when he says.

"Seyya sundarazhiyan addikke chottinane sol malai".

Thirumayam

This divya desam is in between Pudukottah and Karaikudi. It is approachable by rail. The temple is about one mile from the railway station. The moolavar is known as Satyagiri Nathan/Sathya Murthi. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Utsavar is known as Meyappan. Thayar is known as Vuyyavandha Nachiar. The vimanam is known as Sathyagiri. The theertham is known as kadamba pushkarni, sathya theertham.

In the one thousand names of Vishnu detailed in Sahasranama, we find the names "Sathya" and "Sathyaparayana". In this shrine at Thirumayam, the name of the deity itself is Satyamurthi, i.e. embodiment of truth. Everything in this place is associated with truth. The hill is known as Sathyagiri. The forest is known as Sathyavanam. The tank is known as sathya pushkarni. The God is known as Sathyamurthi. Lord Siva here is also known as Sathyagiriswara.

The Tamil equivalent of truth is "Mei". God who represents truth is known as "Meyyappan" as also "Meyyan". Naturally the place where the deity resides is called "Thirumeyam" which highlights the original significance of this place.

Thirumeyam is thirteen miles from Pudukottah. It is also connected by a road which winds beautifully around the hill and the village. On the slope of the small hill there are two cave temples of the early Pallava type. It is believed that these were excavated during the reign of the great King Mahendravarman. The two caves are fifty feet apart from each other and they contain beautiful bas-relief representations of Vishnu and Siva. In the olden days standing at a distance one could worship both the deities. Later, the shrines were separated by a wall. One of the inscriptions refers to a dispute that arose in the later days regarding the distribution of the gifts made to the two shrines. This dispute that existed between the authorities and the devotees of the two shrines necessitated the creation of a special tribunal consisting of members of the village sabha and representatives of the neighbouring temples. A Hoysala Gen-

eral named Appanna Dandanayak presided over this arbitration meeting and gave the awards in regard to the distribution of the produce of the temple lands. It is said that he allotted the produce between the Siva and Vishnu shrines in the ratio of 2:3.

Lord Vishnu is represented here in the reclining form as Ananthasayana and the sculptural group very much resembles the one at Mahabalipuram. As Thirumangai Alwar had sung about this deity, this cave temple must have been excavated long before 8th century.

There is a fort on the top of the hill. It is believed that one Vijaya Raghunathan constructed it in the 17th century. It was once besieged by a Maharata chief named Ananda Rao one of the Thondaiman rulers took refuge in it. Later Oomaidorai, brother of the famous Kattabomman, was in hiding here until he was betrayed to the British. Originally the fort is said to have had a ring of forts with seven concentric walls and an extensive moat around it. The ruins now reveal to the visitor the turret and gun positions and a cellar on the top of the hill, probably used as an arsenal in olden times. To its back and on the sloping face of the rock we can see a Lingam carved out in a niche. The Siva and Vishnu shrines themselves have been carved out in a single rock. There are not many shrines in India where one can worship both Hari and Hara within the same temple precincts and from the same spot. In the great temple at Chidambaram one can stand before the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Nataraja and turn to his left and worship Sri Govindaraja as well. But at Thirumeyam the images of both Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva were carved in two adjacent caves and can be worshipped from the same spot before a wall separated the two shrines.

One other general interesting feature of this divya desam is a stone inscription in the temple. It is very evident there from that King Mahendra who was highly proficient in music had a carving engraved in this cave detailing the Sangita swara in Pallava script. Unfortunately, an inscription made later over this made the original undecipherable.

This place has very interesting sthala puranam. It is believed that God appeared and gave darshan to Adhi Seshan as also to the Moon God, son of Athri Maharashi, to Garuda, to Sathya Maharishi, to Pururavas Chakravarti and to Dakshakan and Indra.

The theertham is known as Sathya pushkarni. This is to the east of Sathyagiri. It is believed that the three sins viz. Aathyathmikam, aadhibowdhikam, adhideivagam can be got rid of by having a bath in this pushkarni. It is said that all the rivers in the country also came to this pushkarni in order to absolve themselves of the accumulated sins left by the sinners who had their bath in those rivers. Even today, in the month of vaikasi on the full moon day it is believed that all the rivers merge and get themselves purified in this theertham.

Let us now learn how this place got the name Sathya kshetram. Once upon a time the asuras had got the upper hands. No yagas could be performed. The Devas were very weak and frightened. Sathyam i.e. truth and Dharma had no place in the world. At that time Dharma Devathai became a bull and went to Azhagar hill. Sathya Devathai took on the form of a deer and came to venu vanam i.e. Thirumeyam. The place was known as venu vanam because it was full of bamboo forest. Sathya Devatha did tapas to Perumal on the banks of Sathya pushkarni. Hence it is that the place which was known as venu vanam earlier, is today known as Sathya kshetram, as Perumal appeared before Sathya Devatha and blessed it and promised to re-establish truth in this world.

Let us now relate in brief the story connected with the darshan given by Lord to Adi sesha. Once upon a time Adisesha prayed to the Lord to rid him of all evil thoughts and evil qualities that are inherent in a serpent. Adi sesha wanted to get rid of his "thamo gunam" which was an inevitable trait of the serpent family. He wanted to attain sathva gunam. When he asked God as to how he could achieve such a transformation, Perumal advised him to go and pray at Sathya kshetram. God advised him to repeat the Ashtakshara mantram in that kshetram. It is said that God also explained that the Ashtakshara mantram's

first letter is white in colour, the second is red in colour, the third is black in colour, the fourth is again red, the fifth is of the colour of kum-kum, the sixth has the golden colour, the seventh again has the colour of kajal i.e. black and the eighth letter is again a mixture of red and white. Perumal advised him to repeat this Ashtakshara mantram with sincerity and he assured Adishesha that he would be rewarded. Accordingly, Adishesha went to Sathyagiri. It is believed that usually Adishesha is a 1000 hooded serpent. He realised that if he were to go in that form to bhoolokam, people would be scared of him and hence he transformed himself into a small form with five hoods. He traversed in the bowels of the earth and then came up near Sathya kshetram. The path followed by adishesha before he emerged in Sathya kshetram became a pit as it were and henceforth that place came to be known as sarpa nadhi i.e. Pambaru. In course of time in response to the sincere prayer offered by Adishesha, Perumal appeared before him in the form of Hayagreeva i.e. Perumal with the face of a horse. Adishesha was very happy and he requested Jagatpathi to bless him. He requested that in that Sathya kshetram God should manifest himself in the form similar to that which is seen in Thiruparkadal. He requested God to manifest Himself in the sayana pose lying down on Adishesha and thus enable the countless devotees to offer worship to Him. God agreed and hence it was that in Sathya kshetram Perumal is seen not as Hayagreeva but as in the sayana pose in which he is seen in Thiruparkadal i.e. as Ksheerabdhinathan.

Another interesting story connected with this kshetram explains how the Moon God had the darshan of the Lord at this kshetram. Athrimuni is the husband of Anusuya. He was a famous rishi. He worshipped Brahma and Vishnu as well as Siva and requested that he should have Thirumurthis as his children. The Gods conceded his wish. Accordingly as Vishnu amsam Dattatreya was born as a son to Athri, and as the amsam of Siva, Durvasa rishi was born and as the amsam of Brahma the bright effulgent Moon God was born to Athri maharishi. Thus this rishi had the blessing of having Mummurthis as his children. The rishi duly initiated his children into the various manthras. The three children took leave of Athri maharishi and went to the respective pre-ordained places to do tapas.

Durvasa went to Kailasa malai; Dattatreya went to the foot of the Himalayas and Moon God went to Sathyagiri kshetram and did tapas on the banks of Sathyapushkarni. In due course God appeared before him and asked him to ask for any boon. The Moon God then requested that just as Perumal has nithyavasam in Suryamandalam as well as in sathyagiri, similarly in Chandramandalam also Perumal should have permanent residence. God conceded his request.

Another interesting story connected with this kshetram deals with Garuda receiving the blessing of the Perumal at Sathykshetram. Once upon a time Kashyapa rishi had two wives by name Kadru and Vinatha. The two wives were jealous of each other. One day Vinatha had friendly dispute with Kadru about the colour of the tail of the horse of Indra. Vinatha said it was white. Kadru said it was black. The argument became very heated. They then decided to test it by seeing with their own eyes the tail of the horse. Kadru said that if she won, Vinatha should become her slave. Vinatha was so sure that the tail was white, that she readily agreed to the wager. But the cunning Kadru meantime approached her son Dakshagan the snake and asked him and his brothers to go and cover up the white tail of the horse completely with their bodies so that the white tail will look black. When Vinatha and Kadru went to check up the colour of the tail, as expected it looked black. True to her word Vinatha completely subjected herself to the whims, fancies and wishes of Kadru. She found life was becoming unbearable. One day she went to Kashyapa rishi and cried and asked as to what she could do to get out of the irksome situation. The rishi explained how Kadru had played a trick on Vinatha with the help of her sons. The rishi therefore advised that Vinatha also should seek assistance from her sons in order to get over the situation. He gave Vinatha some "havis" and asked her to make it into four parts and to eat it. She could then have four children. One amongst them will be very powerful and he would surely help her, said the rishi. Vinatha accordingly ate the four parts of the havis. But two parts became infructuous. The third one also resulted in an immature child being born. But the last one in due course produced a very bright shining child with a broad shouldered body. Vinatha was very happy.

The rishi said that this child was Samavedaroopi that his face is the embodiment of the essence of the vedas i.e. pranava. His head was Gayatri, his two wings are Brahatsamam and Radantharasamam. His entire body was a samam by name Vamadevyam. In course of time the rishi told him about his purpose in life. One day Garuda said that he was feeling very hungry and asked his father for advice. The rishi then advised him that Brahma had created a tank of ghee in order to perform Somajith yaga. In that tank of ghee there is a tortoise. The rishi advised Garuda to catch that tortoise, swallow it and thereby get rid of his hunger. After satisfying his hunger the rishi asked Garuda to take efforts to release his mother from the bondage of Kadru. For that purpose the rishi said that Garuda will have to bring Amrith. He asked him to go to Sathyakshetram and do tapas for that purpose. As advised by his father Garuda went and caught hold of the tortoise in the tank of ghee. He lifted the tortoise and put it on the top of a tree near the tank and was preparing to gouge himself with the feast. But the branch of the banyan tree could not bear the weight of the bird as well as the tortoise and broke. The branch fell on the rishis who were doing tapas under that tree. Immediately Garuda flew down, sought pardon from the rishis and explained to them the purpose of his journey. The rishis forgave him and showed him the direction of Sathyagiri kshetram. Accordingly Garuda did penance on the banks of Sathyagiri kshetram. In due course Perumal appeared before him. Garuda requested Him to help him to obtain the Devamrith. Perumal looked at Garuda and told him that on the top of the Maha meru parvatham there was some Amrith left in a kalasam. He said that the kalasam was being guarded by Indra and other Devas. However with His blessing, He assured Garuda that he will overcome the guards and get the kalasam and release his mother from her bondage. Perumal added that the divine nector was meant only for the Devas. As such, as soon as Garuda gives it to Kadru, the kalasam will go back to Swargaloka. Perumal said that as Garuda's mother suffered a lot due to the duplicity of Kadru and her sons Dhakshagan and others, henceforth you will become the enemy of the serpents; you will be a God of death for them. But there are eight Naga serpents who have done tapas and received Perumal's blessings. Those Ashta nagas viz., Seshan, Vasuki,

Dhakshagan, Sangabalan, Karkodagan, Kuligan, Paduman and Mahapaduman, will become like ornaments to Garuda and that he should not kill them. Garuda was very pleased. He requested that God should continue to reside in the same place and give darshan to the other devotees also. Hence it is that Perumal is seen in the archa form at Sathyagiri kshetram.

Another story connected with this kshetram relates to Sathya Maharishi who came to this kshetram and did tapas. This rishi was doing severe penance on the slopes of Himalaya Mountain. There was a river known as Pushpathirai flowing there. On its bank there was a block of stone known as Chitrasilai. The rishi was doing his penance. Close to it there was a banyan tree known as Pathiravadam. Sathyatava rishi was doing tapas under the banyan tree. One day he went to cut and collect a few small sticks for the homam. But unwittingly he cut his own finger with the knife which he was using for cutting small sticks. The finger which was cut immediately became ashes. There was no bone or flesh or blood split at that place. What was more unusual was the rishi did not realise the loss of his finger. He tied up a small bundle of sticks and was very happy and returning to his place thinking all the time of God. By the time he reached his place of worship, the finger which was cut grew again to its old shape! This entire unusual episode was noticed by two Kinnara strees who were sitting on the Pathiravadam banyan tree. These two went to Devaloka and related this miracle to Lord Indra. Immediately Indra went and narrated this to Upendra his brother who is none other than Vishnu. The two brothers decided to come down to earth and see this great rishi. Indra transformed himself into a hunter and Upendra took on the form of a boar. Upendra pretended as if he was hit by the arrow. He ran to the place where the rishi was seated. He was followed by the hunter Indra. Indra then addressed the rishi and said "oh rishi I and my family are very hungry. I saw this boar and was very happy that I can satisfy the hunger of my family by killing the boar and eating it. But now it has taken refuge in your ashram. I find that the foot prints lead up to your ashram and are missing after that. Surely the pig should be inside. Please allow me to kill that pig". The rishi was in a dilemma. He realised that if he were to say that

he did not see the pig it would be a lie; but if he says that he saw the pig entering his ashram, then the pig would be killed. Further, the rishi also realised that if he were to say that he did not see the pig, the hunter's family may die of hunger. He looked at the hunter and said "Oh hunter! In this world we have been given eyes in order to see. We have been given the tongue in order to utter words. But what is material is who is the one who talks, who is the one who sees and who is the person who asks the question, who are you? Who am I? You first try and understand these major issues. Thus by his clever answer he got out of a tricky situation. Upendra as well as Indra were very pleased with this wise reply. They appeared in their true form before the rishi. The rishi then fell at their feet. He asked for the reason for the Perumal and Indra coming all the way to his humble hermitage. The Perumal replied "we heard about your greatness from the Kinnara ladies. We therefore wanted to test the greatness of your tapas. Hence it is that we came here. We are now very pleased with the sincerity and depth of your tapas". The Perumal advised the rishi to go to Sathyagiri kshetram where Adhi Sesha, Garuda, Chandra and others had all done tapas and attained siddhi. He advised the rishi also to leave the Himalayan slopes and proceed to Sathya kshetram and continue with his tapas there so as to attain moksha faster. He then assured him that in due course he would again appear before him and bless him with salvation. On hearing this the rishi was very happy but he said that the pathravadam in the banyan tree, was greatly responsible for his depth of devotion, so was the chitrasilai, the pure block of stone, which gave him the sathva gunam. Similarly, the pushpapathiri, this river, he claimed cleaned him of all his sins. He said he was very attached to these three things. They were almost like a father, mother and friend to him. The rishi continued that he had been staying on the Himalayan hills for so long that he was a bit reluctant to leave the place and go to Sathyagiri kshetram. Perumal cajoled the great rishi to go to Sathya kshetram. He praised the rishi for his everlasting friendship and gratitude to his three friends. He assured him that the banyan tree and the chitrasilai will be lifted, lock, stock and barrel and carried by Iravatham the elephant of Devaraja and Indra, and that the Pushpathirai river will emerge in Sathya kshetram with His blessings. On being

assured of this, the rishi agreed to go over to Sathya kshetra. He agreed to continue his penance there. Perumal then assured him that he would be rewarded for his penance when Pururavas chakravarthi came to the same Sathyagiri. Perumal further added that Dakshagan, His dwarapalaka, who was cursed by Durvasa maharishi and transformed into a snake would come to this kshetram seeking your blessings. At that time, Perumal promised the rishi that He would reward him with salvation. Perumal continued that the banyan tree brought by the rishi and established on the banks of the river at Sathya kshetram will in Krithayugam be known as Patravada, in Threthayugam it will be known as Asvatha and in Dwaparayugam it will be known as Puthradeepa and in Kaliyugam it will be known as Panasa. Saying all this God disappeared. Sathyavatha maharishi went over to Satya kshetram and continued the penance which he started in Himalayas and in due course after all the events foretold by Perumal took place, the rishi attained salvation.

In response to the prayers of Sathyavatha rishi God continued to appear in His archa form in the same place so as to enable other devotees also to have His darshan. Thus it was that the Sathya maharishi was cajoled by Perumal to come and continue his prayers in Sathya kshetra.

Let us now relate the story connected with Pururavas chakravarthi and his attaining salvation in this kshetram. The king Pururavas chakravarthi was a very pious king. He was a staunch upholder of truth and dharma. Once he was performing a manasika pooja to God. For doing this manasika pooja the articles used are usually as follows; the adhikoorma i.e. the tortoise is the place where the vessels are kept. The milk that is used as offering for God is the ocean. The food that is offered as naivedhyam are the fourteen worlds and the crops, herbs and trees in that fourteen worlds, the flowers are the stars, the chandanam is Moon God, the jewels are the twelve adithyas, the cloth is the four directions, the holy water that is offered is the Ganges and the other holy rivers. The light is the Sun God and the other navagrahas. The appams used for naivedhyam are the manthras and other great mountains; for preparing the panakam jaggery pieces are none other than

the small hillocks. Having all these pooja dhravyams one offers worship with one's mind to God. On one such occasion when Pururavas chakravarthi was offering manasika pooja to Perumal when he was trying to prepare the panakam he felt that due to his carelessness the small hillocks which stood for jaggery slipped out of his hands and fell into the ocean which stood for the milk. He thought the incident really occurred and that the hillock which had fallen into the ocean had occasioned water drops to splash on to the broad chest of Perumal! Immediately he felt that an apacharam had occurred and wanted to wipe the chest of Perumal. He took a piece of cloth to wipe the chest of Perumal! Such was the enthusiasm and all engrossed devotion in his manasika pooja. When he was trying to wipe the drops of water, Perumal who was in Tiruparkadal had a smile on his lips. Thayar asked Him as to what was the cause for His smile. He narrated to her the ridiculous act of His pious devotee. Immediately Thayar requested Perumal to reward the sincere prayers of that devotee by giving him darshan. Perumal and Thayar got on to Garuda and came to Sathya kshetram. But God decided to have a small leela of his own. He took on the form of a pig. Vishwaksenar and others who were following Perumal also became pigs. These groups of pigs destroyed the crops. The people were all frightened at these wild animals. They came running to the king and sought protection. Pururava the king immediately called the hunters and asked them to destroy the pigs. The hunters took spears, swords and other weapons and the hunt began. Vishwaksenar who was heading this group of pigs was successfully able to resist the hunters. Many of them were wounded. They ran back to the king and told about the fate of the hunters. Immediately the king got angry and he himself set out to kill those pigs. His ministers advised him that the whole situation looked unusual and they felt that it might be a ruse of the Devas to test the king. The king replied that he would go and fight with them; if in reality the group of pigs are Devas he would fall at their feet and worship them. Otherwise he would kill them and thus stand by his people and rid them of their problems. When he faced the group of pigs he lifted his spear and rushed towards the group of pigs. Vishwaksenar and others chased the army which followed the king. The entire army took to its heels and ran away. This angered the king more.

He decided to fight the pigs alone. But he found any number of arrows that he was letting loose did not hurt the pigs. One pig succeeded in carrying away the bow of the King. The King then took a sword and chased that pig and hit it. It was wounded and from the wound blood started oozing. It dropped the bow in that place and ran away. The king collected the bow and chased the wounded pig. It is believed that the path taken by the pig while dragging the King's bow on the ground became a deep pit and later became the river "Mukthakarmugai". Even today this is the river which is southern boundary of Sathya kshetram. The chase by the king of that particular pig continued. The pig ran towards the hill. The pig entered a cave in the hill. The king followed. The pig came out of the cave and it was followed by the king. Finally the pig reached the spot where Sathya maharishi was doing his penance i.e. on the banks of the Pushkarini. Perumal gave up His Varaha form and appeared in His true form along with Thayar before Sathya maharishi as well as Pururava chakravarthi. As promised earlier Perumal gave salvation to Sathya maharishi. He also blessed Pururava chakravarthi and rewarded them both for their devotion with salvation. This is the story as to how God who was pleased with the manasika pooja of Pururava chakravarthi took on a Maya varaha roopa and finally gave him darshan in Sathya kshetram.

We shall now relate the story of how Dakshagan who was cursed by Durvasa rishi got relieved of his curse. One day Durvasa who was an amsam of Lord Shiva wanted to meet Lord Vishnu. He went to Thiruparkadal. He was stopped by the Dakshagan the dwarapalaka who was guarding Thiruparkadal. The rishi got very angry. His eyes became red and he cursed the dwarapalaka should become a snake. Dwarapalaka immediately rushed inside and fell at the feet of Perumal and asked him to save him from the curse. Perumal then told Dakshagan that the curse of a brahmin can be redeemed only by another brahmin. Perumal advised him to go to Sathya kshetram and stay there till Pururava chakravarthi comes to that place. Perumal then promised him that he would be relieved of his curse at that time. Accordingly Dakshagan went to Satyakshetram and attained salvation at Sathya kshetram when Pururavas Chakravarti and Sathya rishi also came to that place.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to the life history of Indradumyan. He was a rajarishi. Once he decided to perform a Digvijaya yatra. In that connection he along with his army came to the southern part of India viz. Tamil Nadu. When he reached a beautiful spot on the banks of the river Vellaru, He got down from his chariot, had his bath in the river. But when he returned, to his utter dismay, he found that his chariot along with the charioteer and the horses were missing. The king felt convinced that this must be the work of either a Deva or asura who must have stolen his chariot. At that time an old brahmin came there. The king offered namaskaram to him and asked him as to how in that forest which is full of wild animals and robbers he was bold enough to walk alone. He wanted to know what was the purpose of his journey. The old brahmin replied that he had two sons - one is without any form i.e. angaveenan and the other has many faces. (The angaveenan is Manmatha. The "vegumugan" is Brahma). I am old. My house has become dilapidated. I do not have any energy to rebuild the house. I have therefore come in search of you, oh mighty king so that you might rebuild my dilapidated house". The king then replied that he was the ruler of Magadha desam. His name was Indradyumnan and that he had come there in the course of his Digvijaya yathra. He told the brahmin about his missing chariot. He said that either the Devas or the asuras must have stolen it. The King said "Oh Brahmin, you appear to be very innocent but you are saying that this village belongs to you. I therefore feel that it is you who might have hidden my chariot". The king said this in a sarcastic manner. The brahmin then replied "Oh king even if the Devas have stolen your chariot they can be controlled by mantras. I possess such mantras. If you fulfil my desire I will be able to fulfil yours". The king agreed and said "Oh brahmin if you show me my chariot now immediately I agree to renovate your dilapidated house and I will ensure that for the rest of your life you do not have any wants". Immediately the old brahmin who was none other than the Perumal looked at the Sun God and stood as if he was offering some prayers. After some time the horses, the charioteers and the chariot appeared on the sky. As perumal in the form of brahmin showed the chariot to Indradyumnan on the sky, this place came to be known as Therkattur i.e. the place where the chariot i.e. Ther, was shown.

The king was non-plussed. He realised that the old brahmin must be the Perumal. He fell at his feet and asked him to show his dilapidated house so that he could keep his part of the bargain. The brahmin told him that from the south of that place about two miles away there is a hill known as Sathyagiri. I live at the foot of the hill. My house is there. Having said that immediately the brahmin disappeared. The king followed the directions and reached Sathyagiri. He met a rishi who was doing tapas at that place. He bowed before him and told him all that happened. He asked the rishi whether he knew where the old man lived. The rishi then told him that the old brahmin was none other than Sathyagirinathan, i.e. Perumal himself. The rishi told how in the kshetram Adhishesha, Garuda, Chandra and later Pururava chakravarthi had all done tapas. He asked the king to renovate the temple. Indradyumnan agreed and it is believed that the present temple is the one which was renovated and built by that king.

One other interesting story mentioned about this divya desam is that Adhishesha is guarding this kshetram. It is said that once some asuras came to steal the Idol and that immediately Adhishesha let loose tongues of flame and killed the asuras.

Such is the series of beautiful stories connected with this divya desam which is regarded as abode of Sathyam i.e. truth and righteousness. The Vishnu in this place is known as Adhi Rangan suggesting that the God is older than at Srirangam, which is the premier city of Vaishnavism in South India.

Thirumayam is not far from the famous caves of Sithanavasal and Kudimia malai of old Pudukottai State.

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar has sung 9 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One such pasuram along with the song sung by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning is given below:-

Peria Thirumozhi (3-6-9):

நிலையாளா! நின் வணங்க வேண்டாயே

யாகிலும் என்

முலையாள ஒரு நாள் உன் அகலத்தால் ஆளாயே!
சிலையாளா! மரமய்த திறலாளா! திருமெய்ய
மலையாளா! நியாள வளையாள மாட்டோமே.

Meaning:

Oh Lord who is holding the celestial bow Sarngam in Your hand,

Oh Lord Who in order to instill confidence in Sugreva, felled with one arrow the seven Sal trees.

Oh Lord Who reside at Thirumeyam;

Even if you do not grant me the wish of worshipping you by rendering humble service to you throughout my life, You should bless me and atleast once embrace me and hold me close to your chest. It is my fate that I have to suffer the pangs of seperation till I receive your anugraha i.e. benign blessing.

Note: Alwar as Parakala Nayaki is uttering these words of sorrow and pain at the seperation from her Lord.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi:

ஆளாய் உனக்கு அன்பாய் ஆசையாய் நாணலியாய்
வாளாய் மனைவி என்று வாழ்வேனைக் - கேளாய்
திருமெய்ய மாயா சிலை கால் வளைத்து
வரு மெய்ய மாயா மதன்.

Meaning:

I am your slave;

I have boundless affection towards you;

I love you madly;

I have lost all my sense of shame and think I am married to you and I am your wife;

I am in this state of absolute surrender. How is it your are not bothering about me? It is almost as if You have discarded me; That Lord of Love Manmadha who unfortunately was not destroyed completely may come with his sugarcane bow and flower arrows to distract me further and cause more pain.

**Oh Satyamurthi Perumal of Thirumayyam;
You the possessor of unmatched qualities and author of rare
feats, please advise me as to what I should do in this situation.**

**Note: These lines are the soul searching, heart rending words
used by a lady unable to bear the pangs of seperation
from her Lord, the Perumal.**

*** * ***

Thirumoghur

This divya desam is on the bus route between Madurai and Melur. It is about 10 Kms. from Madurai. The moolavar is known as Kalamega Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture with the right hand in a Varada hastam pose and holding the mace in His left hand. He is facing east. The utsavar is known as Thirumoghur Apan. He has all the panchayudhams in His hands. The Thayar is known as Moghur valli as also Mohana valli and Mega valli. The theertham is known as Ksheerabdi pushkarani. The Vimanam is Kedaki vimanam. The God appeared to Brahma, Indra and Rudra. In this place there is also a sannidhi where Perumal is seen in a lying down posture. The Adishesha, the divine serpent, which is his couch has got a golden kavacham i.e. covering.

This divya desam is quite close to Thiruvadhavoor where Manickavasagar the great saivite philosopher was born. This place is also known as Mohana kshetram. It has got murti stalam and theertha viseshams.

In krutayugam due to the Rishi Durvasa's curse Indra lost all his wealth. All the Devas lost their power as well as their wealth. They were frightened of the asuras. They went to Parkadal and worshipped Lord Vishnu and sought refuge at His feet. God assured them of His help. He decided to extract nectar out of the ocean and distribute it to the Devas so as to enable them to regain their wealth and prosperity. The story as to how Perumal took avatar as Mohini and successfully distributed the nectar to Devas alone is too well known to bear detailed repetition. However a brief account will be given of that story, as that is the sthala purana of this divya desam.

Lord Vishnu advised the Devas to churn the milky ocean. When the ocean was churned with the Mandara, mountain as the churning rock and the serpent as the rope. The first thing that emerged was Kala khoota visha (hala hala poison). Lord Siva immediately uttered the words Achuta, Ananta, Govinda and swallowed the poison and retained it in His neck. Later the horse, Uchchaisravas, followed by the Kalpaka viruksham,

Iravatham the elephant, Moon, Ahalya, Mahalakshmi emerged out of the ocean. Finally a pitcher full of the divine nectar i.e. Amritham emerged. Immediately the Devas and asuras started jostling each other so as to grab the vessel filled with nectar. Lord Narayana decided to amicably solve the issue. He took on the form of Mohini, a beautiful divine damsel. He took the Amritha kalasam and asked the asuras and the devas to sit in a row so that He could distribute the nectar. The asuras were so lost in admiration at the beauty of the damsel that they forgot about the Amrith. Meantime Perumal distributed the nectar amongst the Devas. The asuras were thus cheated. Having consumed the Amrith, the Devas regained their lost power and were able to defeat asuras and regain their lost kingdoms. The divya sthalam where Lord Narayana manifested Himself as Mohini is known as Mohana kshetram i.e. Thirumoghur. The devas wanted Lord Narayana to bless them with the darshan of His true form. In response to their request, Perumal appeared before them with his divine form along with Sri Bhoomidevi and Sridevi on either side. As God gave darshan with His body having the deep colour of rain bearing clouds (Kala megam), this place came to be known as "Kalamegamaga Katti aruliya divya desam Mohana kshetram i.e. Thirumoghur". The devas and the munis had their fill of this beautiful figure and requested that He stay in the same place giving darshan in a similar manner to other devotees. God conceded their request. That is how He is seen as a beautiful figure in a standing pose at Thirumogur. He is known as Kalamega Perumal i.e. Perumal with the hue of dark clouds. The place is also known as Mohanapuram.

Nammalwar the great Vaishnavite saint was so taken in by the beauty of Idol that he described the beauty of this Perumal in great detail in one of his pasurams. It is believed that it was this God who accompanied Nammalwar when his soul went to Vaikundam.

Nammalwar sang (pasuram 3675) as follows:

மணித்த டத்தடி மலர்க்கண்கள் பவளச் செவ்வாய்
அணிக் கொள் நால்தடந் தோள்தெய்வம் அசிரரை என்-
றும்

துணிக்கும் வல்லரட் டன்உறை பொழிந்தரு மோகூர்
நனித்து நம்முடை நல்லரண் நாம் அடைந் தனமே.

In this Nammalwar says that the divine feet of God viz., Thiruvadi is like a beautiful flower. The eyes are like lotuses. The mouth is of the colour of coral. The Perumal has four majestic shoulders. He is the supreme, who has the power to annihilate asuras i.e. demons. He is very beautiful. We came to Thirumoghur where such a great Perumal resides and we are now fully secure and safe.

Just like the heavy rainbearing clouds who give the gift of water to the thirsty land, so also the Kalamega Perumal, it is firmly believed, showers His boundless compassion on His sincere devotees and accompanies such souls on their last journey before reaching the feet of the divine Lord. It is said that when Nammalwar had to perform that last journey this God instead of sending Garuda, Adhishesha or other nityasuris to accompany him, He Himself lighted the path. Thus, even if we sincerely worship this God, He will be our guide for the last journey. Some people question as to how Nammalwar could describe the beauty of the Lord in such a telling manner when God led the way and naturally would have been having His back towards Nammalwar. Nampillai, a commentator explains this fact very beautifully when he says that the God who was leading the way for the sake of this one jeevathma, wanted to ensure that the athma faithfully followed him and did not get distracted enroute and lose its way. So Perumal used to turn His head now and then to ensure the progress of that great jeevathma! Thus, Nammalwar had a chance to be blessed by the darshan of the Lord's face on his way to salvation and was able to describe in detail the beauty of the shoulders, the body, eyes, mouth etc., of Perumal. Thus savouring and enjoying to the full, the sight of the Perumal. The athma of Nammalwar followed Perumal. Nammalwar describes in his Thiruvoimozhi in ten pasurams the Perumal of this divya desam as also the theertham, the fields, the town, the people living in the town, the mandapam. It is quite interesting to recall here the ten names with which Nammalwar describes the Perumal.

1. Kalamegham (Dark cloud)
2. Alangkalang kanni aeerum perudayammal (one with a thousand names)
3. Vendrim moovulagalithu thuzhlvan (Conqueror of all words)
4. Sudarkol jothi (the glowing lamp)
5. Padarkol pampani palli kolvan (one who resides on the bed of snake)
6. Nam sudaroli oru thani mudalvan (the one of unsurpassed effulgences)
7. Anda moovulakalandavan (Ruler of the universe)
8. Koothan kovalan kuthatru vallasurargal kootrum (the death of the asuras)
9. Nangatkum amararkum munivarkum enban (Friend of sages, Devas and us)
10. Thirumoghurathan (Master of Thirumoghur)

Thirumangai Alwar also sings about the glory of this place in the same breath with which he praises Thirumalaruncholai. Manavala Maamuni in his "Tiruvoimozhi Nutru Andhaadhi" also describes this Perumal as the unfailing friend who will come with us on our last journey in the following words:-

தாளடைந்தோர் தங்கட்குத் தானே வழித்துணையாம்
காளமே கத்தைக் கதியாக்கி - மீளுதலாம்
ஏதமிலா விண்ணுலகில் ஏகவெண்ணும் மாறனென
கேதமுள்ள தெல்லாம் கெடும்.

These sentences conveys the following meaning. --

Nammalwar decided that Kalamegha Perumal of Thirumoghur is his saviour and that he would definitely act as an unfailing guide in the last journey of the soul before reaching Paramapadham, provided the athma seeks solace at the feet of that Perumal. Nammalwar therefore sought the help of Thirumoghur Perumal to reach paramapadham. He says that if we even merely mention fact that Nammalwar sought the grace of this Perumal, all our troubles and turmoils will vanish.

The utsavamurthi in this place is known as Thirumoghur Aptan. This was the name given to Him by the Alvars. Aptan means a sincere close friend who does not let one down even during difficult times i.e. one who stays with you through thick and thin. Hence the Alvars assured us that this is the Perumal to whom we should pray and that He will assure us salvation. He will ensure that we attain moksha. Azhagiya Manavala Perumal in His "acharya abyudayam" (third prakaranam 182 churnikai) says "Margabandhu saityam mohanathe maduveedu". It means that unlike rivers, tanks and oceans which are warm during the summer months and cold during the winter months, this Perumal has a cool compassionate glance always, just like the cool water- falls on the hills.

This temple is famous for its shrine for Sudharsana Alwar. Chakrattalwar is the personification of the discus, one of the weapons of Vishnu. In the shrine Sudarsana Alwar is giving darshan with His sixteen hands holding sixteen weapons. He is seen in a prathyaaleeda pose which means that the figure is shown with its feet in a posture as if the person is running. People believe that Sudharsana Alwar in this pose is ever ready to run and rush to the rescue of His devotees. On the reverse there is the figure of Narasimha in yoga attitude. The front hands of Lord Narasimha rest on his knee. He has the bent legs crossing in the front. The other pair of hands holds the chakra and the shanku. His head is surrounded by streams of flames and is just like flaming fire. The utsava vigraham of Lord Sudharsana also has a similar figure of Lord Narasimha at the back. Such a situation where the moola vigraham as well as the utsava vigraham are identical is said to be a very rare phenomenon.

As soon as one enters the temple, on the southern side there is a separate shrine where Perumal is seen in His sayana pose along with Bhoomidevi and Sridevi. In that sannidhi He is seen lying on the divine couch Adishesha. It is said that when the ocean was churned, one drop of amrith fell into the tank at this place and henceforth the tank came to be known as Ksheerabdi pushkarini. It is to the south of that tank that Perumal is seen in His lying posture. There are seven types of sayana

thirukolam. They are: Boga sayanam, Veera sayanam, Bala sayanam, Sthala sayanam, Uthana sayanam, Anandha sayanam, Prarthana sayanam. Prarthana sayanam pose is a rare one. In this shrine we have the Perumal lying down in a prarthana sayana pose. The Thayars are sitting near the feet of the Lord raising Their hand and offering worship to the Lord. They do not want to wake up the Lord who is sleeping. At the same time they are praying so that He may arise, awake and bless His devotees waiting for His darshan. Since the Perumal in this Ksheerabdi nathar sannidhi is facing the southern direction, the worship of that Perumal is said to ensure victory to the devotees.

Once the utsava vigrahas in this temple were looted by one Mohamed Ali during the Karnatic wars. At that time, the kallars living in this place fought with the Mohamedans and got back the vigrahas. In commemoration of the services rendered by the kallars, even today, when the Perumal of this place goes to the elephant hill (yaanai malai) for the Gajendra moksham utsavam, He dons the garb of the kallars.

Apart from the mythological and religious significance, this place is also historically important as is evident from the inscriptions in and around the temple garbagriha, ardha mandapa walls etc. They refer to Thirumoghur as Rajendrachola Valanadu and Rajendrapandya nadu. Thus conveying the fact that the Chola kings Rajaraja Chola and Rajendra Chola conquered this area. The inscriptions also speak about the various grants made by different kings and chieftains. The Nayak kings of Madurai and Maruda brothers of South have helped a great deal to build a part of the good old temple. The majestic statues of Maruda brothers in a prayerful posture facing west near the entrance to the dwajasthamba mandapam is evidence even today of the great service rendered by these two brothers.

The temple has got beautiful stone and bronze icons. The bronze icons belong to the period from 12th to 19th century.

Epigraphical Highlights:

On the southern wall inside the first prakara of the kalamegha Perumal temple at Thirumoghur, there is an in-

scription which registers the gift of a village for repairs to the temple of the Perumal of Thirumoghur.¹

On the same southern wall there are a few more inscriptions which registers the gift of land to the shrine of Thiruvazhi Alwan and the gift of a village for repairs to the temple of the God at Thirumoghur.²

Another interesting inscription on the northern wall of the Palli Konda Perumal shrine in the Perumal temple records that the brahmanas of Kundalai Chathurvedu mangalam should provide for the offerings of the God when taken in procession for marriage in the month of Margazhi and during the hunting festival according to the scale fixed for daily offerings in the temple.³

Yet another inscription on a pillar in the mandapa on the front of the empty shrine in the Perumal temple relates to the period of the Kulasekharadeva the Pandyan king. It registers a gift of money for service in connection with the temple.⁴

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar and Nammalwar have sung 12 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One such pasuram along with the song sung by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning is given below:

Nammalwar:

Thiruvaimozhi (10-1-1):

தாள தாமரைத் தடமணி வயல் திருமோகூர்
நாளு மேவி நன் கமர்ந்து நின்று அசுரைத் தகர்க்கும்
தோளு நான்குடைச் சுரிசுழல் கமலக் கண் கனிவாய்
காள மேகத்தை யன்றி மற்ற றென்றிலம் கதயே.

Meaning:

- ¹ Ins No.329 ARIE 1918 Appendix B
- ² Ins No.330 & 331 ARIE 1918 Appendix B
- ³ Ins No.334 ARIE 1918 Appendix B
- ⁴ Ins No.335 ARIE 1918 Appendix B

We have no saviour and protector other than Kalameghaperumal, who has a sweet looking mouth, who has lotus like eyes, who has curly hair, whose mighty shoulders have the strength to destroy asuras, who is standing majestically at Thirumoghur, where the verdent green fields are surrounded by tanks filled with lotus flowers.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumai Iyengar's
108 Tirupathi Andhaadhi:

- வாயால் மலர் கோடு வாவி எதானும் மேயுமோ,
 மேயாமல் அப்பால் விரையுமோ - மாயன்
- திருமோகூர் வாய் இன்று/சேருமோ, நாளை
 வருமோ கூர்வாய் அன்மை வாழ்ந்து.

Meaning:

Will the intelligent Hamsa (Swan) tht I sent as my envoy to go to Thirumoghur to convey to the Perumal my state of mind, return immediately tomorrow itself or will it spend all the time nibbling in a leisurely way the petals of the lotus flowers in the water tanks enroute?

Note: This poem beautifully expresses the loving impatience of the lady who is watching the return of the messenger she sent to Perumal. She is sitting on pins and needles fretting and fuming at the likely possible delayed leisurely pace of return of the swan!

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SRIVILLIPUTTUR

Srivilliputtur is situated in the heart of the ancient land of the Pandyan kings i.e. the present Ramnad district of Madras State. The town is an ancient and legendary town. The Western Ghats with its thick green forests is to the west of this town. There are mountain ranges to the north and southwest of the town. Adjoining the town there is a thick grove full of shenbaga trees. It is known as 'Shenbaga thoppu'. This town is the birth place of the great saint Perialwar and his still greater foster daughter Andal. It can be reached by train. The railway station with the same name is on the main line that connects Madras to Trivandrum. It is about 26 miles down from Virudhunagar junction. It can also be reached by road as it is on the main trunk Road.

The emblem of the Tamil Nadu Government is the temple tower of the Vathapatra sayee Perumal at Srivilliputtur. The pilgrims who enter the town, be it by train or by bus can see the imposing temple tower beckoning them even from a distance.

A number of famous persons lived in this town. Manduka Maharishi also known as Sikappa muniver stayed in this place. Goraka maharishi, a famous siddhar also lived here. This maharishi spent a great part of his life in Srivilliputtur and in the forests in Azhagar hill nearby. The medical book written by him in Tamil is known as 'Gorakar vaippu'. He has also written another famous book dealing with herbs. In this town was born Thirugnanasanbandar who established the Saiva Siddhantha Gnana peetam as well as the Dharumapura Adheenam in Thanjavur district. Some of the other famous persons who lived in this place are Ponnayira swamigal, Sivaprakasa swamigal, Arumuga Thambiran swamy, Kailasasundara swami, Muktanandha swami, Mounaguru Sankaranandha swami etc. Each of these swamis has a separate temple in this town where nitya poojas are performed. A famous exponent of vaishnavite traditions by name Sri Vedapiran Bhattar held this place in such reverence as it was the birth place of Perialwar and Andal, that he said he would place the feet of all those who mention the name of Villiputtur even once, on his head and worship them

reverentially! Sri Krishna devaraya, the famous Vijayanagara king, Sri Ramanuja, Sri Vedantha Desikan, Kavi chakravarthi Kamban, Manavala Maamuni, are the other famous persons associated with this place.

Srivilliputtur is also known as Varaha kshetram, Pudur, Pudukai Puttur, Vanmikapuram, Vadeswarapuram.

There are two temples in this town. One is that of Vathapatra Sayee Perumal. This is the divyadesam temple. The other is the temple of Andal, the famous vaishnavite saint. Both the temples face the east. The Andal temple it is believed was originally the residence of Perialwar. It is locally known as Nachiyar Thirumaligai.

The Vathapatrasayee temple which is known locally as the Periya Perumal temple has a huge temple tower which is nearly 196 feet tall. It has got eleven tiers. The kalasams on the top of the temple tower are also eleven in number. It is believed that Sri Vallabha Devapandyan also known as Nedumaran, The King of Madura built this tower. The great Tamil poet Kambar composed a poem comparing this temple tower to Mahameru parvatham. This couplet is inscribed in one of the stones on the southern base of the gopuram. Kamban is reported to have gifted the choodakam jewel to the Lord here. There is a karna paramparai story associated with this temple tower. It is said that at the time of the muslim invasion, the armies came marching into this temple, ready to plunder the precious jewels etc., in the temple. At that time, a vaishnavite devotee stood before the onrushing armies and tried to prevent them. The army chief was impressed by his apparent fool hardy bravery and his staunch devotion. He challenged the devotee saying that if he had so much of faith in the Lord he should go to the top of the tall tower and jump and his God should save him from being killed. He assured the devotee that if his God protected him, he would, in return go away without desecrating the temple. The devotee accepted the challenge and without batting an eye lid went to the top of the tower and jumped. It is said that, he received no injuries at all inspite of the jump. The muslim chief was impressed with this and left the place without looting the temple.

The moolavar here is known as Vathapatra sayee Perumal. He is seen in a bhujanga sayana pose facing east. The thayar is known as Andal. The theertham is known as Thirumukkulam. The vimanam is known as Samsana vimanam. God appeared to Manduka muni and Perialwar.

The Vathapatra sayee temple has three entrances. It is believed that in 1800 B.C. Khan Sahib came to plunder Andal temple. The idols in both the temples were therefore removed and kept safe in Trivandrum till 1850 B.C. The Administration of the temple was also under the control of Travancore Maharaja perhaps it is this influence which is reflected in the Perumal temple here also having three entrances. Another unique feature is that this temple is in two floors. It is said that once upon a time, the area was covered by forests and ant hills. There was a lot of subterranean springs as water used to ooze out from the ground. The temple was therefore built in tow tiers. Any temple built in two tiers, the silasula agama prescribes, that the bottom tier should have avatara bhimbams and the top tier should have the sayana bhimbams. Accordingly here in the top tier on a high base is situated the moolasthanam with Perumal in the sayana posture. There are steps on the southern side through which one reaches the top. The moolavar is seen in the garbagriha lying down on the five hooded Adishesha. Sridevi and Bhodevi are sitting on the two sides pressing the divine feet. God is seen in the bhoga sayana pose. His right hand is hanging down. The left hand is in a abhaya mudra. Nearby are the idols of Villi and Kanthan, the two hunter chieftains. From the navel the lotus is emerging with Brahmaseated on it. Perumal has the bow, the mace, the shanku, the chakra and the sword i.e. the five ayudhams. The Sun God, Moon God, Varuna are also seen. Near God's head Garudalwar and Senai Mudalvar are seen standing. There are two other forms standing nearby. It is a male and femal form. They are knwon as Kinnara Mithunam. These forms have the foot of a bird and above the waist they have a human body. They also have wings like a bird. One of these forms is holding a veena in his hand. The other is holding the cymbal. By the side of the Adishesha couch on the right hand side we see Markandeya rishi and on the left hand side Brighu maharishi. On the northern wall even the picture of Lord Siva

is painted. The crown as well as the clothes and jewellery of the moolavar are all having the colour of gold and hence presents a dazzling picture. In the month of Margazhi when the Margazhi utsavam starts Andal fully bedecked is brought to the temple of Vathaptra sayee to offer her prayers first. At that time, in order to enable the public to have a clear look of the divine sight of Andal offering her prayers to Perumal all the three vasals i.e. Moolastana door ways are fully opened. At that time, one can have a clear vision of the thirumukham, the thirumeni and the thiruvadi is the holy face, the holy form and the holy feet.

In the top tier is situated the Pagal pattu mandapam which is also known as Gopala vilasam. In that Mandapam, the wood work is very beautiful. The incidents from Ramayana and Mahabharatha are all depicted as pictures. It is said that once when the original ratham was doing its rounds on the mada streets it went out of control and landed in the Thirumukkulam tank. It could not be pulled out. It was therefore cannibalised and the Ramayana and Mahabharatha panels were taken from that ratham and fixed on to the ceiling of Pagal pattu mandapan. In the southern prakara of this temple is the Nandavanam where Andal was born.

This town is also known as Varaha kshetram. Sutha Pūranikar is said to have related to the sages in Naimisaranya (as reported in Varaha kshetra mahatyam in Varaha puranam) the origin of this place. Once upon a time, Hiranyaksha the demon was troubling the sages and the saints living in this place. He was a burden to mother earth. One day he stealthily carried away Earth as personified by Bhoomi Thayar and kept her hidden in the depths of the ocean. Perumal manifested himself as varaha (Boar), plunged into the ocean, rescued Bhoomidevi after killing Hiranyakshan. Varaha roopam is one amongst the ten avataras of God. After Bhoomi Devi was rescued, God gave a promise to Bhoomi devi that He would continue to reside in this place and give darshan to other devotees. Hence it is that this place is known as Varaha kshetram.

Later this place became deserted and a wild forest grew in the area. But the place was so peaceful and naturally beautiful

that the sages and saints like Bhrigu and Markandeya resided there and performed penance. A demon by name kalanemi however spoilt this idyllic beauty by troubling and disturbing the sages in their meditation. The sages sought intervention by Narayana. Narayana ordered His powerful Chakrayudham to kill Kala Nemi. The chakrayudham performed its assigned task. However the disc was stained with the blood of Kala Nemi. In order to clean the chakrayudham Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi were ordered by Varuna to come down to this place and mingle their water in a tank where sudharsana could be washed. Hence it is that the tank in this place known as Thirumukkulam as also Triveni. This Thirumukkulam tank is said to be the one to which the Andal referred in her Tiruppavai while exhorting all her companions to go and have their holy bath before performing the Margazhi Nonbu. Even to-day on the banks of this tank at the foot of a arasa maram facing north a small idol of Sudharsana Perumal can be seen. After having killed Kala Nemi in response to the request of the devotees Perumal continued to stay here in His archa form. He stayed here as a sayana murthy under the Banyan tree. Hence He was known as Vatapatra sayee and the place came to be known as Vadeswarapuram.

There is yet another story which explains the origin of the name Srivilliputtur. Once upon a time, Srivilliputtur and its surroundings areas were ruled by a queen by name Malli. The place was known as Malli Nadu. Even to-day close to Srivilliputtur, there is a town with the name Malli. Malli rani had two sons Villi and Kanthan. One day they went hunting in the forests of Vadeswarapuram. Kanthan followed a tiger which unfortunately attacked him and killed him. Meantime, Villi missing his brother started searching for him in the forests. He was tired. He fell asleep under a tree. In his dream, Perumal appeared and told him that his brother was killed by a tiger and that Perumal Himself was lying hidden underneath the shrubs and ant hills. He directed Villi to clear the over growth of vegetation that hid Him and build a temple with the help of the Pandyan king at Madura. Villi obeyed the divine command. He cleared the forests and the ant hills and renovated the town and the temple. The place which was renewed by him and

re-discovered by him came to be known as Villi Pudur that is the new town established by Villi, the chieftain. Peria alwar himself refers to this place often in his hymns as Thenpuduvai. The suffix Sri came to be added to this name in course of time because of Andal's presence. It is worthwhile to note here that amongst the 108 vaishnavite divya desams more than 90 are having the prefix Thiru before the name of the place. For example, Thirumalai, Thiru kkannapuram, Thiru vallikkeni, Thiru vananthapuram, etc. But there are a few divya desams to which the prefix Sri alone is attached. For example Sri rangam, Sri Vaikumtam, Sri villiputtur. Even in the case of the first two viz. Srirangam and Srivaikintam sometimes they are referred to as Thiruvarangam and Thiru Vaikumtam. But Srivilliputtur has the unique distinction of being referred to only as Srivilliputtur.

This place is also known as Puduvai Putrur, or Vanmikapuram. Putru in Tamil means ant hill. This temple was once covered up by ant hills and got submerged with the forest growth and ant hills on it. Later as stated earlier Villi cleared the forests and the ant hills i.e. Putrus. Hence the place came to be known as Puduvai Putrur i.e. new town where ant hill existed once. Vanmikapuram means the place of the ant hill.

Yet another story connected with this place is as to how a hill near this place got the name Manduka hill. Once upon a time, a sage by name Sudhaba was doing penance on the banks of Silambaru in Thirumalirun cholai. One day as he was repeating the Ahamarshana mantram, he was immersed under water. Sage Durvasa chose that time to come to that river. Sudhaba rishi did not notice the arrival of Durvasa. This was enough to anger Durvasa who felt that the rishi had failed to receive him with due honours. He cursed that the rishi become a frog i.e. a mandukam. Sudhaba begged of Durvasa for forgiveness. Durvasa repented a bit and said that he would be able to overcome this curse by going to Darmadri hill near Srivilliputtur, have his bath in the river there, perform penance to the Perumal there. Sudhaba rishi therefore came to be known as Manduka rishi and the Darmadri hill where he did penance to Perumal came to be known as Manduka parvatham.

Manduka rishi who was earlier praying at Thirumalirun cholai had begged Perumal to appear before him in that archa form in which He is seen at Thirumaliruncholai. It is said that in response to the prayers of Manduka rishi, Perumal appeared as Sundararaja Perumal of Thirumaliruncholai at Manduka hill. The rishi regained his original form and attained moksha.

Though the divya desam is with reference to the Vatha patra sayee Perumal temple, as the mere mention of the name Srivilliputtur brings in our minds eye the presence of Andal, the famous vaishnavite saint. It will be worthwhile to briefly digress here and also describe some of the unique features of the Andal temple.

The Andal koil is bigger than the Vathapatra sayee Perumal koil. It is also facing east. Pillars in this temple are all huge. Each of these pillars has got sculpted figures which are breath taking. The figures of Venugopala, Rama Lakshmana, Karna, Manmatha, Paramasiva in the form of Bikshandar, Visvakarma, Saraswathi are all sculpted on those pillars. The figure of Saraswathi from the big toe in the foot, till the tip of the nose has been sculpted so beautifully that when we are looking at it, if we draw a imaginary line from the big toe in the foot to the tip of the nose, it will be a straight line. Yet the sculpted figure has got four bends. This is the height of finesse in the sculpted items. In yet another pillar, there is another sculpted masterpiece, the face is that of an elephant, from the neck to the waist it is the figure of a woman, from the waist downwards it is the figure of a lion. In the same pillar, on the other side, the sculpted figures of Sankha nidhi and Padma nidhi figures of Goddess Lakshmi have been sculpted. These figures of Sankha and Padma Nidhi are not to be found in any other place. In the Andal temple, there are three wells. One is known as Kannadi Kinaru i.e. the mirror well. It is also known as Darpana theertham. This is the famous well where Andal used to watch her reflection be decked with the tulasi garland meant for the Perumal. The water in this well is crystal clear and never dries up. There are no fishes or frogs in this well. The other well is known as Chandana kinaru i.e. Sandalwood well. It is also known as Garuda theertham There is another well

known as Thirumadapulli kinaru i.e. well at the holy kitchen of the Perumal. It is known as Vasuki theertham. In the garbagriham of this Andal temple, we see Rangamannar, Andal and Periya Thiruvadi all in Eka simhasanam. Rangamannar is in the middle with Andal on His right and on the left Periya Thiruvadi. They are seen as a pranava roopam. It is also known as pranavakara darsanam. Rangamannar represents akaram. Andal represents ukaram and Garuda represents Makaram. The three together i.e. As+Uu+Ma form the holy word Om. The philosophy is that Rangamannar, Andal and Garuda represent Iswara Prakruti and chetana siddhantha which is known as Tatvatreya in vaishnava sidhantha. Garuda represents achit, Perumal stands for Easwara, and Andal represents chit. Further Rangamannar in this temple does not have His usual Shanku and Chakram in His hand, but holds a sceptre the like of which is not to be seen in any other vaishnavite temple. In Sri Andal Anju Mani Maalai, the poet says that Garudalwar has been given equal status with Perumal in this temple as a measure of thanks giving to the divine vehicle who brought Rangamannar well in time before the muhurtham for the wedding with Andal. As a reward Pakshi raja is seen standing on an equal base along with Perumal and Andal.

There is yet another interesting story connected with the utsava vigraham of Andal in Andal temple. Andal had once promised Azhagar residing at Thirumalirun cholai 100 kudam (pots) of akkaravadisil (sweet Payasam) as well as vennai (butter) as neivedhyam. But she forgot to fulfill the promise. Ramanuja who was born much later than Andal came to know about this unfulfilled vow of Andal and when he visited Thirumaliruncholai divya desam he is said to have fulfilled this promise of Andal by offering to Azhagar, the akkara vadisil. He came to Srivilliputtur later. When he came to Srivilliputtur Andal was so happy at Ramanuja fulfilling her forgotten promise, that she rushed out of the garbhagriha to receive Ramanuja and addressed him as the brother who fulfilled the vow on behalf of his sister! She rushed out of the garbhagriha, upto the ardha mandapa, to welcome Ramanuja. Even to-day Andal's utsava vigraham is located in the ardha mandapan and not in the moolasthanam.

Yet another unique aspect at the Andal temple is the placing of the figure of a Parrot in Andal's hand. In Nachiyar Tirumozhi, Andal sent cuckoo as her envoy to convey to the Perumal her love for Him. She then promised the cuckoo that in return for the services rendered, she could gift her pet parrot as a companion and friend. As a reminder of this pasuram, even to-day in the left hand of Andal's vigraham everyday a parrot is kept. This represents the pet parrot brought up by Andal! This figure of parrot is made out of Plantain coir, thin bamboo sticks, pomgranate fruits plus vellai and red arali (local white and red plants), besides certain leaves of flower trees like nandiyavattai leaf, naga malligai ilai etc. The art of making this parrot is known only to select families in that temple town. It is passed on from generation to generation. It is a difficult handicraft unsurpassed in its natural beauty. It is said to take three hours to prepare a parrot. This parrot which is kept in the hand of Andal is given as prasad to the devotees the next day. The lucky devotee values that parrot as a rare harbinger of divine grace.

There is an interesting story connected with the installation of the Sudharsana Alwar in Andal temple at Srivilliputtur. This story has already been referred to in Volume III of this series in the chapter dealing with the Ayudhams of Maha Vishnu. However, to make this chapter self-contained, the story of Chakrattalwar at Srivilliputtur is recapitulated in brief here. It is believed that the idol of Chakrattalwar in the Andal temple at Srivilliputtur was once upon a time in Trivandrum. Once when the muslims invaded Pandya Nadu, the idols in Srivilliputtur were taken for safe custody to Kerala. At that time, the idol of Sudharsana Alwar in Trivandrum temple was in a very ugra roopam emitting fire. It is said that the moment the Andal's idol was taken to Trivandurum, Sudharsana Alwar calmed down. When Andal Vigraham returned to Srivilliputtur, Sudharsana again became fierce. Therefore, the idol of Sudharsana Perumal from Trivandrum was brought to Srivilliputtur to the Andal temple. For a long time, it was not even installed and it was placed in the top tier of the Vathpatra sayee Perumal koil without any worship. Only later, a sannidhi was set up for this vigraha. This vigraha is made of pancha loham. Sudharsana Alwar is seated on a high base. It is not a mere idol of Chakrattalwar. It

is believed to be an idol of Sudharsana roopa Narayana as the idol is seen along with Srivatsam. On the other side of the Sudharsana Alwar vigraham the usual Narasimha pose is seen, the Narasimha roopa is seen along with Yoga lakshmi. Hence the moolavar on this side is regarded as Sudharsana roopa Lakshmi Narasimhar.

The ratha i.e. the wooden chariot of Andal koil is also very famous. As stated earlier, the original chariot was made by Thirumalai Nayakar. Once it was dragged so fast that it landed in Thirupparkadal tank. As it could not be pulled out, the sculpted pieces of Ramayana, Mahabharatha in that chariot were cannibalised and they were fixed on to the roof of the Pagal Pattu mandapam in the Vathapatra sayee Perumal temple. The present chariot in Andal koil was made by Vanamamalai Jeer about 140 years ago. It is about 160' in height. Though this chariot is kept in the open neither the nails get rusted nor the wooden pieces become crusty. Originally, the chariot was requiring fifteen thousand people to pull it round the streets of the temple town. But to-day with certain technological improvements by putting bushes etc. to the chariot wheels and by reducing the height of the chariot, it requires only seven thousand people to pull it. It may take even a few day for the chariot to make its round of the four streets and come back to the original resting place. But the day it comes back to the resting place is regarded as Chitra Pournami day irrespective of what is the actual star on that day and the festival is celebrated on that day!

The Theerthams of Srivilliputtur:

There are a number of holy tanks in this town. The Kannadi theertham, the chakra theertham, the Thirupparkadal theertham, the Thirumukkulam or Tiruveni theertham, Manduka nadhi or Noopura Ganga theertham located near Kattazhagar temple near Srivilliputtur, the Koneri tank at the foot of Thiruvannamalai near Srivilliputtur, the Kanva theertham, a small water fall about five miles to the north of Srivilliputtur, the Pancha theerthams in Shenbaga thoppu i.e. Shenbaga forest are a few amongst the many holy tanks in this place.

Any account of Srivilliputtur is incomplete without touching upon the life and history of the two alwars, father and daughter duo viz. Perialwar and Andal. It is now proposed to briefly touch on these two.

Perialwar:-

Perialwar known as Vishnu Chittar was the fifth son of brahmin parents - Mukunda and Padma. He used to tend a flower garden and supply flower garlands and tulusi leaves for the daily worship of Vathapatrasayee.

One day in Madurai, known in those days as Kudal, Vallabha deva the pandian king was ruling. He was known for his righteous rule and wide conquests. He had a habit of occasionally walking through the streets of Madurai in-cognito so as to gather first hand information about the problems and opinion of his subjects. On one such inspection round, he saw a brahmin sitting on a pial. He asked him as to who he was. The brahmin replied that he was a pilgrim returning after having his bath in the Ganges. The king then asked him whether he had any worthy philosophy to impart to him. The pilgrim then recited a poem which translated reads as follows:-

"Eight months in the year, labour, to happily live at home
the four rainy months.

Half the day labour for spending the night happily.

Work in manhood to provide for dotage.

Use present birth on earth to secure moksha hereafter".

On hearing these simple words, the king was struck with wonder. He started wondering whether he who was able to satisfy all his material wants had worked enough for meeting his spiritual needs. He wanted to know how he was to go about this task of equipping himself spiritually so as to attain moksha. He sent for his teacher Selvanambi and asked him for advice. Nambi then advised him to summon a council of wisemen who are proficient in the vedas and learn from them the philosophy. He felt that the spiritual path would perhaps be shown by the wisemen. The king agreed. He commanded the pandits to be

summoned from all parts of his kingdom. He also announced that a precious bag filled with money and gems and jewels would be offered as a reward for the victor in this debate amongst the intellectual giants. This prize money bag would be tied up in a cloth and hung up to a festoon which could be cut by the victor.

At that time, one day when Vishnu Chittar was sleeping, the Perumal appeared in his dream. Perumal made up His mind that this faithful devotee of His was the best instrument which could be used to enlighten the Pandyan kings and his subjects. That night in the dream Perumal ordered Perialwar to attend the king's court and win the prize. Perialwar could not believe this dream as he was an illiterate person who was a mere gardener fit enough only for using the garden implements, tending the tulasi plants, plucking the tulasi leaves and tying them into a garland, fit for the God to wear. However, the faithful devotee did not dare to disobey Vathapatrasayee. He had implicit faith that Perumal who chose him would look after the rest, as victory or failure was that of the Perumal. He journeyed to Madurai. He was received by the king as well as his council of ministers. The debate began. The other intellectual giants assembled there looked at this with interest. But when Vishnu Chittar started speaking, the fundamental vedantic philosophy floated out of his lips due to the inspiration from God. Vishnu chittar explained to the august assembly that Vishnu is Narayana, that He is para brahma, the beginning and end of all creation, that He is the person from whom creation flows, endures and to whom creation returns. He therefore advised that all those who seek moksha should meditate on the one and only Perumal who is Narayana. Even as he was lecturing, the precious prize bag which, as stated earlier, was hung up to a festoon, of its own motion came down within reach of the speaker i.e. Vishnu chittar. Thus a miracle occurred to prove that Vishnu chittar was the undoubted victor. He cut it asunder and took all the prize money. The entire assembly stood up in reverential devotion and threw themselves at the feet of Vishnu chittar. They honoured the speaker with great pomp. They led him to a decorated caparisoned elephant. He was made to get on to it. All the pandits formed a grand procession and Vishnu Chittar sitting on the elephant headed this procession. The crowds shouted that Vishnu chittar was the

knower of the fruits of the vedas. The trumpets were sounded, the conches blew. The king conferred on him the title 'Pattarpiran' or the Brahmana chief. The procession wound its way round the streets of Madurai.

It is said that Vathapatrasayee Perumal was so pleased with this resounding success of his disciple. He wanted to witness the glorious procession even as the parents fondly watch the triumphal demonstration of their children. Perumal in His effulgent glory along with Thayar seated on His divine vehicle, Garuda, came to witness the procession. Perialwar who had a look at this divine vision described it as a delicate blue coloured cloud resting on a golden hill. God was accompanied by all the nitya suris and other devas. Perialwar who saw this sight was happy and at the same time worried. He knew that God was all powerful and all protective. Yet he got worried that Perumal had come into this mortal world which was under the control of time, where life was hell, where men were cruel and where kali ruled. He had fear for the safety of His divine master, in this unworthy world. Such was his love for God that he started worrying about the safety of God in this cruel world. He was worried lest something should mar the beauty of the Perumal or something should rob Him of His strength and His glory. He therefore decided to bless the Lord even as the parent blesses the child. Perialwar was overcome with motherly love seeking to protect the innocent loving child from all the ills of the world. Perialwar is always known for his vatsalya bhava. His sentiments of motherly love towards God, distinguish him from other saints. He then burst out into hymn, blessing the Lord which verses are now known as Thiruppallandu. He is the only Alwar who has sung this kind of a song blessing God himself. Usually it is the other way about when God blesses the mortals. But here a mere mortal took up on himself the task of blessing the God!. These verses are sung in all vaishnavite temples as well as before the start of the religious functions in vaishnava houses. Because of the special significance attached to these couplets, it is worthwhile to mention here the meaning of Tirupallandu verses sung by Perialwar. I am quoting here the meaning as given by Shri.K.Varadachari in his book "Alwars of South India".

Meaning:

For many years and everlasting years and many thousands of years and crores and hundred of thousands of years let Thine red feet's beauty be protected! O Lord of emerald-blue hue who have shoulders that vanquished the wrestlers!

Let Thou along with ourselves Thine inseparable servants live for everlasting years! Let Her (Sri) adorning Thee as ornament residing on Thine right chest, live for everlasting years! Let the luminous blazing sharp disc in Thine right hand which is capable of annihilating foes be preserved for everlasting years. Let Thine conch (Panchajanya) whose sound pierces through the clanging din of weapons in battle be preserved for everlasting years.

O Ye who are fit to do service and are ready, come and carry the mud and fragrance (for God's worship). We will not admit onto our fold those who serve other (kings and employers) for food. For in seven births we have not been serving any other. We have sung eternal years to Him (Rama) who in battle utterly destroyed Lanka, the seat of the raksasas.

Come Ye and join us, giving up desire for every thing else, before being lost in the world of sorrow, those who are having a mind to come and join us. Come with a mind to chant with devotion "Namo Narayanaya" (Surrender to Narayana) so that the countryside and town may know. Sing Ye eternal life to God.

O Ye who belong to the community that serves the Lord Master of the senses (Hrisikesa) who is the Ruler of all the worlds, who uprooted the whole host of the Asuras, come and touching His feet utter His (occult) names, abandoning the old grooves and giving up all sense of I and Mine, sing "Let there be thousands of years of life (for God)".

Myself, my father, his father and his father and grandfather, for seven generations are doing all services continuously, to Him who in the hour (star of Trivonam (Sravanam), when the Asuras are strong, slew the foe, in the form of Man-lion, and

we shall sing to our hearts' content, "Eternal life for thousand years to God!"

All our families have to serve Thee who are the abode of the Disc that has red luminosity brighter than that of the Celestial lights. Long life eternal do we sing to Thee who art the master who ordered that Disc to cut asunder the thousand shoulders of Bana, that master of an army capable of wonder warfare, such that blood flowed out of them.

I sing everlasting years to Thee who grantest me excellent ghee-mixed food, unceasing service, betelnuts filling my hands, flower garland to adorn my neck, earrings for mine ears, sandal-paste for my body, and who art capable of making me pure, and who have the foe of hooded serpents for thine ensign (Garuda).

Wearing the cloth which Thou hast worn and discarded, taking the food remaining after Thou hast eaten, wearing the garland of tulasi that has adorned Thee and given to me, thus do we, Thine feet-worshippers performing assiduously the tasks allotted to us in whichever directions, sing eternal years to thee who art lying on the luminous serpent, during the period of Thiruvonam.

On the day when, O Lord, we were connected with the word (mantra) that made us Thine slaves (inseparable from Thee), then itself there resulted to us Thine slaves renunciation of all attachments.

To Thee do I sing eternal years, who was born on an auspicious day in Mathura, and who broke the bow and danced on the head of the five-hooded serpent fierce.

Like Selva-nambi, faultless, ruler of the people of jewels, like Kottiyer, a hill of pride and lord of Wealth, am I Thine eternal slave. Uttering correctly "Surrender to Narayana" and pronouncing Thine many name, O God, who art pure in myriad respects, I shall sing to Thee eternal years, eternal years".

Thus did a mere mortal bless the all powerful Perumal. It is not as if God needed the mortals blessing. But the mortal due

to his overwhelming, overriding vatsalya-bhava-bhakthi like a true mother felt his child however great and powerful he may be, still needed his motherly affection and words of praise and protection.

The life history of Perialwar does not end with this Thirupalandu. Another fact which bears repetition is the manner in which he utilised his prize money. It is said that on his return to Srivilliputtur with the huge prize money he used the entire Prize money for renovating the prakara walls, the mandapas etc. in the Vathapatra sayee Perumal temple. He continued with his usual simple life of tending the tulasi garden and offering the garlands for daily worship to the Perumal.

Andal's Story:-

The greatness of Perialwar is enhanced further by the fact that it was he who gave to the world the equally great if not greater vaishnavite savant viz. Andal. Perialwar was the foster father of Andal.

Andal also known as Goda is the only women vaishnavite Alwar. One day while Vishnu chittar was gathering flowers for worship in the garden, he saw this lovely child lying under a tulasi plant. His joy knew no bounds, as he thought that this child was a divine gift to fulfill his one want of having a child. He named her Kothai which means beautiful like a string of flowers. Goda also means giver of cows, of light, & revelations. It is an ancient name of Sridevi. In Sri Vaikuntam one day Sri Narayana woke up from His yoga nidra. He was in the company of his three consorts Lakshmi devi, Bhoo devi and Neela devi. Bhoodevi asked the God as to whom He loved most on earth. Perumal replied that He loved the person who had no desires and who constantly thought of Him without expecting any benefit in return. Bhoodevi then requested Perumal to allow her to be born in the earth as such an ideal person who would serve Him and sing His praise and later become one with Him. God conceded this wish. It is said that it is She who was seen as a child under the tulasi plant in the flower of Vishnu chittar. Vishnu chittar brought up this child in a spiritual atmosphere always relating to her the incidents in the life of Lord Krishna.

The girl also helped the father in watering the plants, gathering the flowers and tying the garland. The little child grew up into a maiden. She had made up her mind that she would marry none other than Perumal himself. Vishnu chittar used to leave the flower basket in the house and take it to the temple only in the evening. It struck Kothai that she should bedeck herself with these sweet smelling garlands, see her reflection in the crystal clear waters in the well in her house and imagine herself as the spouse of the Lord himself. When she wore the garland, it is said that she did not think of her own beauty, but on the other hand she wanted to know whether she was fit enough to match the beauty of Perumal Himself. Thus this became a daily practice when she would adorn herself with the garland, carefully remove it, place it back in the flower basket and her father, without knowing these activities would take them to the temple. But one day he came home early and the father, to his utter dismay, saw his daughter wearing these garlands meant for the Perumal. He felt that this was desecrating the holy garlands. At the same time, he did not want to wound her feelings. That day therefore for the first time, he failed in his usual task of supplying the garlands to the Vathaptra sayee Perumal. The night Perumal appeared in the dream of Vishnu Chittar and took him to task for having failed to bring Him His daily garland. Vishnu chittar explained the sacriligious desecration due to the unwitting act of his daughter. The Lord is then supposed to have told Vishnu chittar that the garland worn by Goda became more sweet and did not lose their sanctity. He ordered Vishnu chittar to everyday continue to bring the garlands worn by Kothai. This made Vishnu chittar realise the greatness of his foster daughter who henceforth was known as Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar. Literally translated it means, one who wore the garland and then gave it to the God.

Perialwar wanted to get Kothai married. She however was determined to marry only the Lord of Srirangam, Sri Ranganatha. One day again in the dream of Vishnu chittar Lord Ranganatha appeared and ordered him to bring Andal to Srirangam. At the same time in Srirangam a priest also had a vision when Sri Ranganatha directed him to take the insignia, the umbrella, the val (sword), the mace etc. to Srivilliputtur and

escort Andal with all royal honours to Srirangam. Thus even as the retinue from Srirangam started and arrived in Srivilliputtur, the message was given by God to Perialwar to get Andal ready to go to Srirangam. The Alwar thus accepted the divine message. Andal was seated in the palanquin, screened from the public gaze so that no mortal could look at one who was to be God's bride. In great pomp and glory with trumpets blowing this procession reached Srirangam. As the palanquin reached the inner sanctum sanctorum, Andal got down and even when the huge assembly was witnessing, She is said to have gone near the divine couch and merged with God. Perialwar felt happy that Ranganannar had accepted Andal as His divine consort. But at the same time, he wanted to have the pleasure of celebrating the wedding with due pomp and splendour at Srivilliputtur, his native town. It is said that he requested Sri Ranganatha to permit him to celebrate the wedding in the traditional style so that the public could also watch and participate in this celestial wedding. Ranganatha conceded this request. All preparations were made for the marriage. On Panguni Uthiram day, at Srivilliputtur it is said that all were anxiously waiting for Sri Ranganatha to arrive. But there was no sign of His arrival. Andal naturally was worried. She prayed and promised to offer hundred pots of rice and jaggery and hundred pots of butter if the God arrived on time. She also prayed to Garuda, the divine vehicle to bring the God on time before the muhurtham is over. She promised him a place on the same seat (Sama asanam) with herself and the God. It is said that in the nick of time, God arrived seated on His vehicle, the Garuda. In His anxiety to wed Andal before the auspicious time was over, He is said to have jumped down from the vehicle. The priests will even to-day point out the fact of this jumping by the God with reference to the positioning of the legs of the utsava murthi in the Andal temple. The feet are positioned in a manner as if the person is about to jump from a higher place. As stated earlier, God, Andal and Garuda are seen on the same base. Andal is on the right and Garuda on the left. This is called as Pranava darsanam.

Andal is famous for two major works viz. Thiruppavai and Nachiyar Thirumozhi. The former consists of 30 verses and reveals the preparations to be made by the maidens (nonbu)

for gaining good husband. Nachiyar Thirumozhi consists of fourteen sections each with ten hymns i.e. 140 verses. It narrates a course of a vow undertaken to appeal to the Lord of Love to help to increase the love of God for men. This great book i.e. Nachiar Thirumozhi in the words of K.V.Varadachari in his book *Alwars of South India* is a "a study in rapture - the rapture of contemplation, meditation, concentric and continuous and absorption in the beauty of God. One discerns in this composition the whole gamut of sensory, vital erotic, mental and spiritual feeling inter-penetrating in such a way as to present a heightened condition of mystic union. The result is a poetic creativity that almost precipitates a vision of a profound spiritual order".

However, the most popular of the two works of Andal is *Thiruppavai*. This is so called because of the refrain at the end of each one of the thirty hymns. This refrain seeks the help of the divine mother *Kathyayini* for whom this nonbu is performed for securing a good husband. These hymns are sung in the month of *Margazhi*. Even as *Pallandu* is important, this *Thiruppavai* is also important. It will therefore be worthwhile to briefly recapitulate this divine song and its meaning.

Tiruppavai is a Tamil poem of thirty stanzas. It occupies a very honoured place in the devotional literature of India. It provides pure enjoyment to simple folks. At the same time, it is a treasure house of fundamental truths to scholars, philosophers and religious leaders. It is compared very often to a necklace of thirty gems of rare value set in such a manner that even displacement of one of the gems viz. stanzas spoils its unique beauty and effulgence. "Thiru" means holy and sacred; "pavai" means a girl as well as the vow taken by a girl. Andal immortalised her yearning for the Lord Krishna in her beautiful garland of hymns. *Thirupavai* is held to be the quintessence of *Upanishads*. Great vaishnavite perceptors like Ramanuja, Vedanta Desika, Manavala Mamuni have praised this prabandha. Ramanuja was known as *Tiruppavai Jeer* because of his immense devotion to these hymns. He is believed to be responsible for introducing the practice of reciting the *Tiruppavai* in the famous temple of Lord Srinivasa at Tirupathi. Desika in his *Godhastuti* has paid obeisance to Andal. Manavala Mamuni in his *Upadesa*

Ratna Malai, had paid glowing tributes to Andal as one who has exceeded all the Alvars. The great Vijayanagara Emperor Krishnadevaraya showed his devotion and admiration for Andal by composing his famous poem, Amukthamlayatha in Telegu. Tiruppavai is deceptively simple. But the highest and most vital tenets of vaishnavism are expressed and expounded through these simple stanzas. It is veritably held to be a Upanishad saram.

At the time when Andal lived, Krishnavataram was already over. However, she felt that the gopikas were able to attain the Lord through their devotion. She therefore decided to re-enact the Katyayini Vratham which had earlier been observed by the Gopikas in order to win the grace of Lord Krishna. The Katyayini Vratham was celebrated to secure timely and abundant rains for the country and also so that the young girls who celebrate that vratham would secure good husbands. Andal felt that by re-creating that atmosphere of the observance of Katyayini vow by the maidens of Gokulam, she also will be able to reach the Supreme being. Thus, she transformed through her minds eye, Srivilliputtur to Gokulam. The Lord of the temple there became Krishna. Srivilliputtur became Ayarpadi. Andal and her friends transformed themselves into Ayar girls or gopikas. Philosophy of transmigration or time machine series of modern science fiction.

Tiruppavai can be broadly classified as falling into four parts. Stanzas one to five are introductory in nature, six to fifteen deal with waking up of the girls in Ayarpadi. Some of those girls have to be coaxed, other cajoled, some teased, other ridiculed by Kothai so as to wake them up early in the morning. Stanzas 16 to 20 deal with the incidents when the group of Gopika girls go to the mansion of Nandagopa the foster father of Lord Krishna. They follow the due procedure when they first seek permission of Nandagopa, then Yasodha later Balarama and finally Krishna's consort Nappinnai, before they finally reached the presence of Krishna. Through these stanzas therefore Andal makes it clear that one must seek help of acharyas, the devotees and Sridevi and seek their mediation before surrendering to the Lord. No short cuts to salvation.

Stanzas 21 to 30 deal with the absolute surrender of Godha and her gopis to Krishna. Such an absolute surrender and desire to serve is said to be neither for the pleasure of the devotee nor for the joint pleasure of the God as well as the devotee but for the sole pleasure of God alone. This in brief is the mula mantram of Saranagati Sastra. Complete surrender to Him is the upaya and the object upeya is to attain Him. Thus, the upaya as well as the upeya becomes God Himself.

In the bunch of 30 poems, stanzas 26, 27, and 29 are rather important. In the 26th stanza, the gopies enumerate what all they need for the vratham viz. the milky white conches, which emits a sound similar to that emitted by panchajanyam as such a reverberating sound will resound and make the foes to the nombu, shudder with fear. They then want a big parai to announce the start of the nombu. Then, singers who will praise and bless them standing in front and facing them. Then they ask for standing lamps which are auspicious and which enable them to look at each other clearly. They want a lofty banner which would be seen at a distance by all and a canopy which will prevent dew drops falling on their heads. Actually, all these requirements look like simple accessories for celebrating the vratham. But actually the inner meanings of each of these accessories is of great interest. These represents the accessories that are necessary for doing Kainkarya or service to the Lord.

The conches represent Ananyarha seshatvam i.e. the knowledge that they belong to Him and to none else.

The drums stand for Paratantriya gnana i.e. dependence on Him for everything.

The singers who are to bless, stand for the principle of Satsahavasam i.e. company of Godly people. There is an old phrase which says that even the humble thread which is used for tying the flowers gets the pleasant aroma of jasmine flowers by sheer association. Similarly, company of the Godly people is a must for attaining God. One is known by the company he keeps.

The lamps which she asked for, stand for Bhagavat Se-shatva Gnana i.e. Servitude to God.

The banner stands for Bhagavat kinkaryam i.e. service to the Lord directly.

The canopy also stands for Bhogdritva-nivriti i.e. Selflessness. Thus, what we think is the simple enumeration of the accessories for the pooja, turn out to be the accessories necessary for enjoying and attaining the Divine Grace.

The next stanza viz. the 27th song is also interesting as in this stanza girls who have celebrated the vratham are sure that they will be blessed by the God and they will enumerate what all they would get by performing the vratham. They say they would be ornamented with bracelets, with ear rings, pendants, padagam (leg ornaments) and so on and that they would be dressed in the best of their clothes and they will sit with the Lord and partake of the divine food with ghee flowing down the elbow. This also at the first reading look very simple conveying the impression that a bunch of girls are going to be satisfied with the reward of ornaments and beautiful clothes. But each of these gifts have a more significant inner meaning.

The ornaments for the wrist are indicative of Anjali i.e. folded hands. The ornaments for upper arms represent the disc and the conch which are usually imprinted on the shoulders of the vaishnavites when they take to samaasrayam.

The ornaments for the lower ear, represent the Tiru-mantram i.e Om Namō Narayana.

The ornaments for the upper ear lobe, represent the Dwaya mantram which represents surrender of the individual at the feet of the Lord.

The anklets represents charamsloka which asks us to abandon all the duties and efforts and seek refuge only in Him.

The robe represent the feeling that we belong to God only and that feeling should cover us completely even as a robe covers the body.

The anticipatory pleasure from rice cooked in milk and ghee with the ghee dripping down the elbow represents the happiness that a liberated could get through experience of God. Perhaps that is the best possible dessert in the entire spiritual feast.

Let us now turn to the most important of all these 30 pasurams viz. the 29th pasuram. This lays down the goal for human life. It is the crowning stanza for the entire prabandham as it is the quintessence of Vaishnavite philosophy. In this Andal and gopikas say that they first requested Krishna for drum and other accessories, that they now don't want those accessories what they want is permission to stay with Him for ever and render service to Him for ever i.e. nitya kainkaryam. All the desires are to be sublimated to the one desire of being with God and serving only Him. Ahankaram i.e. ego and mamakara i.e. attachment, are all to be given up. One should only sublimate all the human desire into God desire. The Andal here says that what is needed is not suppression of the desire. but sublimation of those desires into desire for God.

Thus a quick analysis of this rustic idyllic song which ostensibly deals with celebrating of the nombu by a group of girls, really conveys the most fundamental philosophy of vaishnavism. This poetic garland of flowers has been held to be a matchless piece of beauty. Sri Jagannathachari in his book 'Tiruppavai Text-Literary and Critical Study' in one of his chapters enunciates as to why he considers this poem as great. He says that Kampan in his Ramayana mentioned a standard or scale to measure the greatness of any poem. A great poem is required to have seven basic characteristics viz. It must be an ornament to the world. Secondly it must be rich in meaning. Thirdly it must instil knowledge and foster research. Fourthly it must contain the expressions dealing with Ahapporul. Fifthly it must contain the five uripporul. By this, the main aspects pertaining to five fold physiographic elements - mountain, desert, jungle, field and beach. Sixthly it must contain the beauties of composition. Lastly it must have an easy melifluous flow. Professor Jagannathachari takes out illustrations from these 30 pasurams to show that all these seven characteristics are more than

met in Tiruppavai. We cannot do better than agree with him. To conclude, let me quote what V.V. Srinivasa Iyengar said on Tiruppavai. He says as follows:- "It is a classic verse. its subject is big. it is an idyll. It possesses lyric warmth and beauty. its rythm and melody are haunting. it is one of the finest specimens, of the provoked poetic thoughts embodied in equally provoking words. It is a simple story charmingly told. It is at once the highest philosophy and religion..... it is indeed a great poem if only for the reason that an ardent and careful reader diving into it, is able to discover many a gem of purest ray serene in it".

Ramanuja was greatly attached to Tiruppavai. He preferred to call himself as Tiruppavai Jeer. There is an interesting story which illustrates his great attachment to Tiruppavai. It is said that every day he used to go about begging for alms reciting the Tiruppavai. One day he went to his guru Peria Nambi's house and sang the 18th song in Tiruppavai. The door of the house was shut. But when he reached the concluding portion of the song which says "Senthamarai kaiyal seerar valai olippa vandhu thirvai". In Tiruppavai Andal used this word addressing Nappinnai and requesting her to open the door with her lotus hand, Jingling with bangles. But when Ramanuja uttered these words in Srivilliputur the door of his guru's house was opened by his guru's daughter. But the coincidence of the song and the incident made Ramanuja believe that Peria Nambi's daughter was Nappinnai herself. He prostrated before her thinking that she was Nappinnai. In memory of this incident, the 18th song in Tiruppavai is recited twice in Andal's temple. These thirty verses have a spiritual depth, a musical melting beauty, a mellifluous sweet flow of haunting melody, the rhyme is simple and sweet. At the same time, it is sublime immersed in philosophic mystic truth. It is now an unequalled masterpiece of devotional literature. Bhattar said that those men who do not know the thirty songs of Tiruppavai are a veritable burden on Mother Earth!

That in brief is the story of Perialwar and Andal, his foster daughter and their unique creative literary masterpiece viz. Pallandu and Tiruppavai.

Epigraphical Highlights:

The Archaeological Research Department of Government of India has done yeomen service in reading a number of inscriptions in this temple. The wealth of material available is so great that the question of picking out the important ones amongst them in view of the limited space available in this book has proved to be very difficult.

However, I leave it to the readers, if they are so interested to verify the original Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy for more details. Only select inscriptions are referred to in the following paragraphs:

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the Perumal temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan King Jatavarman. It registers a gift of land for conduct of Sri Vallabhan sandi service in the temple of the Goddess sudi Kodutha Nachiyar at Srivilliputtur and for feeding 24 Sri vaishnavas in the matha.¹

Another inscription on the same wall relating to the period of the same Pandya king records gift of lands for providing offerings and worship to the goddess Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar at Srivilliputtur.²

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the same central shrine relating to the period of the Pandyan king Tribhuvana chakravathi Konerinmaikondan states that as the brahmin suburb of Srivilliputtur became decolonised, the king made a gift of 108 shares of land to as many brahmanas learned in the vedas and 14 more shares to men proficient in Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Jothisham etc. The shares were clubbed together and a new village called Sernaivenra Pandya Chathurvedi man-galam named after the king was created.³

¹ Ins. No. 531 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B

² Ins. No. 532 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B

³ Ins. No. 533 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

Yet another inscription of the western wall of the same shrine registers a gift of a village for meeting the expenses of conducting annual repairs to the temple of Chudi kodutha Nachiyar.⁴

Yet another inscription on the same western wall of the same Perumal temple registers a gift of certain land for meeting the expenses of conducting a bath and providing offering, burning perpetual lamps in the temple of Perumal and Thayar Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar at Srivilliputtur on the day of Mrigasirsha, the natal star of the king.⁵

Yet another inscription on the southern wall of the same central shrine records that the king made a gift of a village for conducting the service called Vira Marthandan sundi and for the special festival on the Swathi nakshathiram day on the temple of the Goddess Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar and for feeding 33 brahmanas daily in the Viramarthandam matha.⁶

Yet another inscription relating to the period of Kulottunga Chola deva records a gift of sheep for lighting a perpetual lamp in the temple.⁷

Yet another inscription on the northern verandha of the central shrine relates to the period of the Pandyan king Sundarapandya deva. It states that based on a representation made from the Mahasabha of Srivilliputtur the tax was reduced on one kani of land. The order was passed by prince Vikramapandya deva with the approval of the king.⁸

Another inscription in the same verandah relating of the period of the same king records a gift of 28 cows for burning a lamp in the temple.⁹

⁴ Ins. No. 537 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B

⁵ Ins. No. 538 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

⁶ Ins. No. 540 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

⁷ Ins. No. 551 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

⁸ Ins. No. 554 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

⁹ Ins. No. 555 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

Another inscription on the dwajasthambam of the Perumal temple states that the flag staff on the car were the gifts of Thirungnansambanda Pillai for the merit of Karttakal.¹⁰

Another inscription says that the prakara wall was built by the King Jatavarman Pandya.¹¹

Another inscription says that the gopura was built by Tadiyaradhanam Tirumalaiyappangar.¹²

There are numerous inscription in the central shrine in Andal temple which register the gift of land for doing various services in the temple.¹³

On the southern wall of the mandapam in front of the central shrine in Andal temple relate the mythological connection between God Krishna and Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar in the village.¹⁴

Other inscriptions on the same wall again register gifts of land, villages for meeting the expenses connected to the deity.¹⁵

Yet another inscription on the same southern wall of the mandapan in Andal temple states that the boundaries of the land belonging to the temple of the goddess Chudi Kodutha Nachiyar and the God Padi Kasuvaitha Nainar were defined properly and clearly by a committee consisting of Virappan Nayakar, Ariyanatha Mudaliar, etc.¹⁶

Another inscription in the same shrine states that the ardha mandapa was erected by Sundara Tholudaiyar Mahabali Vanadhirayar.¹⁷

¹⁰ Ins. No. 559 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹¹ Ins. No. 561 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹² Ins. No. 562 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹³ Ins. No. 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 569, 571, 572, 573, 575 and 576 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹⁴ Ins. No. 577 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹⁵ Ins. No. 578, 579, 580 and 581 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹⁶ Ins. No. 582 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹⁷ Ins. No. 583 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

Another inscription on the gopuram of the Perumal temple relates to the period of the Vijayanagara king. It says that two generals under Ramaraja Vithaladeva maharaja made a gift of a tax called kelvi- magamai leviable from Srivilliputtur for providing the Tiruvandi kappu service in camphor during worship to the Goddess chudi kodutha Nachiyar.¹⁰

Similarly another inscription on a slab set up by the side of gopuram states that certain minor taxes leviable on the barbers were removed.¹¹

A very curious inscription on the slab set up outside the Perumal temple registers an order given to parangusa Ekangiar by Venkitarama kittinayyan agent of the temple that anyone purchasing from the temple funds iluppai oil and ghee except for the temples requirements shall be considered as committed sinners. Apparently, misuse of temple funds started in a small way even then. But may be, it could be controlled by making a public inscription like this prohibiting it and declaring it to be a sin.¹²

Another inscription on the southern side of the gopura of the Perumal temple registers a tax free grant of land as sarva manya to certain washerman to settle down in the village and continue to do the service to the temple of Krishna.¹³

Another inscription in the Sundararaja Perumal temple central shrine relating to the period of the Pandyan king Maravarman Sundara Pandyan II records the assigning of income from taxes on Kuvani in Vilupparayanallur for food offerings to the goddess whose images were set up in the temple.¹⁴

Another inscription near the entrance to the garbagriha of the Lakshminarasimha swamy shrine of the Vathapatrasayee temple records that the mahasabha of Villiputtur names a sluice

¹⁰ Ins. No. 585 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹¹ Ins. No. 586 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹² Ins. No. 589 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹³ Ins. No. 594 of ARIE 1926 Appendix B.

¹⁴ Ins. No. 382 of ARIE 1961/62 Appendix B.

and a channel after Sankaran/Muri Arulakki. There is also a verse in praise of the munificence of the said Arulakki. It only indicates that the habit of naming certain public properties after the names of the donors existed even then.¹⁵

In the kattazhagar temple maha mandapa relating to the period of the Nayaka of Madurai records an order of the goddess Goda devi while seated along with Pallikondur aruliyar Perumal in the temple of Srivilliputtur. This order is addressed to the chiefs re-naming the tank Bommaikulam as Virappa samudram and granting the same along with the lands, both agricultural and residential, after making them tax free, to the servants in the temple of Thiru thakkarai azhagar for their maintenance.¹⁶

Another inscription in the Vathapatra sayee temple southern wall of the prakara around the central shrine there is an inscription which related to the period of the Vijayanagara king Jatavarman Kulasekhara I. It records the sale of land in the name of Perumal a levy called Abishega ugavai is also referred to.¹⁷

As stated earlier the number of inscriptions read in this temple are so many that in this short space only a representative sample has been presented.

Hymnology:

Perialwar and Andal have sung 2 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. Both the pasurams along with the song sung by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and their meaning is given below:-

Perialwar:

Perialwar Thirumozhi (2-2-6):-

மள்ளனைய நுண்ணிடையார் விரிசூழல் மேல்
நுழைந்த வண்டு
இள்ளிசைக்கும் வல்லிபுத்தூர் இனிதமர்ந்தாய்
உள்ளைக் கண்டார்

¹⁵ Ins. No. 285 of ARIE 1965/66 Appendix B.

¹⁶ Ins. No. 290 of ARIE 1965/66 Appendix B.

¹⁷ Ins. No. 523 of ARIE 1970/71 Appendix B.

என்ன நோன்பு நோற்றாள் கொலோ இவனைப்
 பெற்ற வயிறுடையால்
 என்னும் வார்த்தை எய்துவித்த இருமகேசா
 முலையுனையே!

Meaning:

Perumal! You are very happily residing at Srivilliputtur where the bees sweetly hum after having sucked the honey from the flowers which adorn the hair of the slim ladies with beautiful waists thin like the streak of a lightning.

Oh Lord! All the people who see you exclaim and wonder as to what was the great punya done by your mother to be blessed with you as her son. You have brought fame to the mother who gave birth to you.

Oh Hrishikesa, please come and drink this milk.

Note: Hrishi + Esan means one who has control over all the five elements.

Andal Nachiar Thirumozhi 5th Thirumozhi 5th song:

மென்னடை அன்மை பரந்து விளியாடும்
 வில்லிபுத்தூர் உறைவான் தன்
 பொன்னடி காண்பதோ ராசையினால் என்
 பொருகயற் கண்ணினை துஞ்சா
 இன்னடி சிலொடு பாலமுதூட்டு எடுத்த
 என் கோலக் கிளியை
 உன்னோடு தோழமை கொள்ளுவன் குயிலே
 உலகளந்தான் வரக் கூவாய்!

Meaning:

My eyes have not had a wink of sleep as their all consuming desire is to see the divine feet of the Lord who resides at Srivilliputtur where the swans dance with the beautiful gait. Oh cuckoo! Please sing and invite the Lord who measured the three worlds to come here. In return, I will make my beautiful pet parrot, fed by me with milk and honey, to befriend you.



Andal of Srivilliputtur



Srivalli puttur Temple Tower



srivalliputtur Chakrathalwar



srivalliputtur Andal and Perumal



Another View of Andal and Perumal



Andal, Perumal and Garuda

**Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
108 Tirupati Andhaadhi :**

குறித் தொருவர் கொண்டாடும் கொள்கைத்தோ, கோல.
நிறத்த லூர் விண்டு சித்தர் நீடுர் - பிறப்பிலியூர்
தாழ்வு இல்லி புத்தூர் என்று ஐவர்க்குத் தான்
வாழ வில்லிபுத்தூர் வளம். இரந்தான்

Meaning:

Is it possible to measure and accurately estimate the richness (wealth) of Srivilliputtur which is famous as the avatara sthalam of Andal and as the place where lived the great saint Perialwar and the Lord who met Duryodana as an envoy of the Pandavas to ask for mere five villages for them.?

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